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ABSTRACT

The Human Services Policy Center of Washington undertook a study of communication strategies for protecting children because of the perception among many leading child protection professionals that a distorted pattern of media coverage is driving child protection policies toward responding to the small proportion of atypical cases which the media emphasize, and away from the large-scale efforts at prevention and early intervention indicated by the bulk of cases referred to child protective services. The intent of the study was to determine if this was a correct perception and to develop an effective communications strategy to improve the situation. The investigation's primary focus was Washington state, but included data and expert discussants from California and from national associations. Data were also drawn from polls, focus groups, and surveys conducted nationally and in several other states. Specific questions addressed were: (1) What are the positive and negative impacts of media coverage on policy and practice of the child protection system in Washington [California]; What would concerned parties like to see happen differently if public attitudes and understanding were more favorable?; (2) What broad-based communications strategy could improve child protection?; and (3) How can it be determined if the strategy is working? This report presents the investigation's findings, including recommendations for developing a communication strategy for protecting children and a proposed University of Washington/Human Services Policy Center project. Contains 47 references. (EV)

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DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN

Report on Problem Definition Analysis Presented to: *The Stuart Foundations*

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DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN

Summary of Recommendations

- **The time is ripe to conduct a communication strategy to change Public Opinion and Child Protection policy, if it includes careful development of message content and utilizes a broad communications strategy that is targeted to multiple audiences and clearly specified policy actions.**

- **Communication should occur through multiple channels: mass media (news, editorial, entertainment), speeches and presentations at schools and civic organizations, articles placed in newsletters and trade journals; direct interaction of child protection agency staff with community members.**

- **The message development effort should bring together representatives of key players from public and private agencies, with media and other communication experts to specify message content and desired behavior changes, to forge durable alliances and provide multiple voices for mutually reinforcing message delivery.**

- **Message content should focus primarily on protecting children, with prevention of child abuse and neglect as the ultimate objective. The roles of public and private agencies and how they could better protect children should be clarified. Quality foster care is an important component of protection.**

- **The effort should balance "policy messages" directed as specific actions and "cultural messages," affecting the environment of beliefs and attitudes in which policy-makers address these issues. There must be a "customer orientation" of determining the dimension and dynamics underlying currently held beliefs in order to develop messages which will produce desired changes in behavior.**

- **The effort should be phased over several years, with careful pilot testing and evaluation of impact in several diverse communities for the first two years. All participants should adopt a "learning orientation," with careful field research, testing and evaluation taking primacy over professional biases or preconceptions.**

- **The project should be conducted by a partnership which combines an organization with the research skills necessary to analyze public opinion and evaluate the impact of the campaign with an organization which has the independence and depth of community networks to implement the campaign.**

Purpose of this study: Problem Definition, Strategy Development

We undertook this study because there is a perception among many leading professionals in the child protection field that a distorted pattern of media coverage is driving child protection policies toward responding to the small proportion of atypical cases which the media emphasize, and away from the large scale efforts at prevention and early intervention indicated by the bulk of cases referred to child protective services. Our intent was to determine is this was a correct perception and to develop an effective communications strategy to improve the situation. We started with a focus on foster care, but soon realized that foster care is simply one of several potential responses to child abuse and neglect, and that it was being influenced by the same forces as the overall child protection system.

Our primary focus was on Washington State, but we also included some data and expert discussants from California and from national associations to assure that we were not reflecting idiosyncratic findings. In addition, we drew data from polls, focus groups and surveys conducted nationally and in several other states.

The specific questions we addressed were:

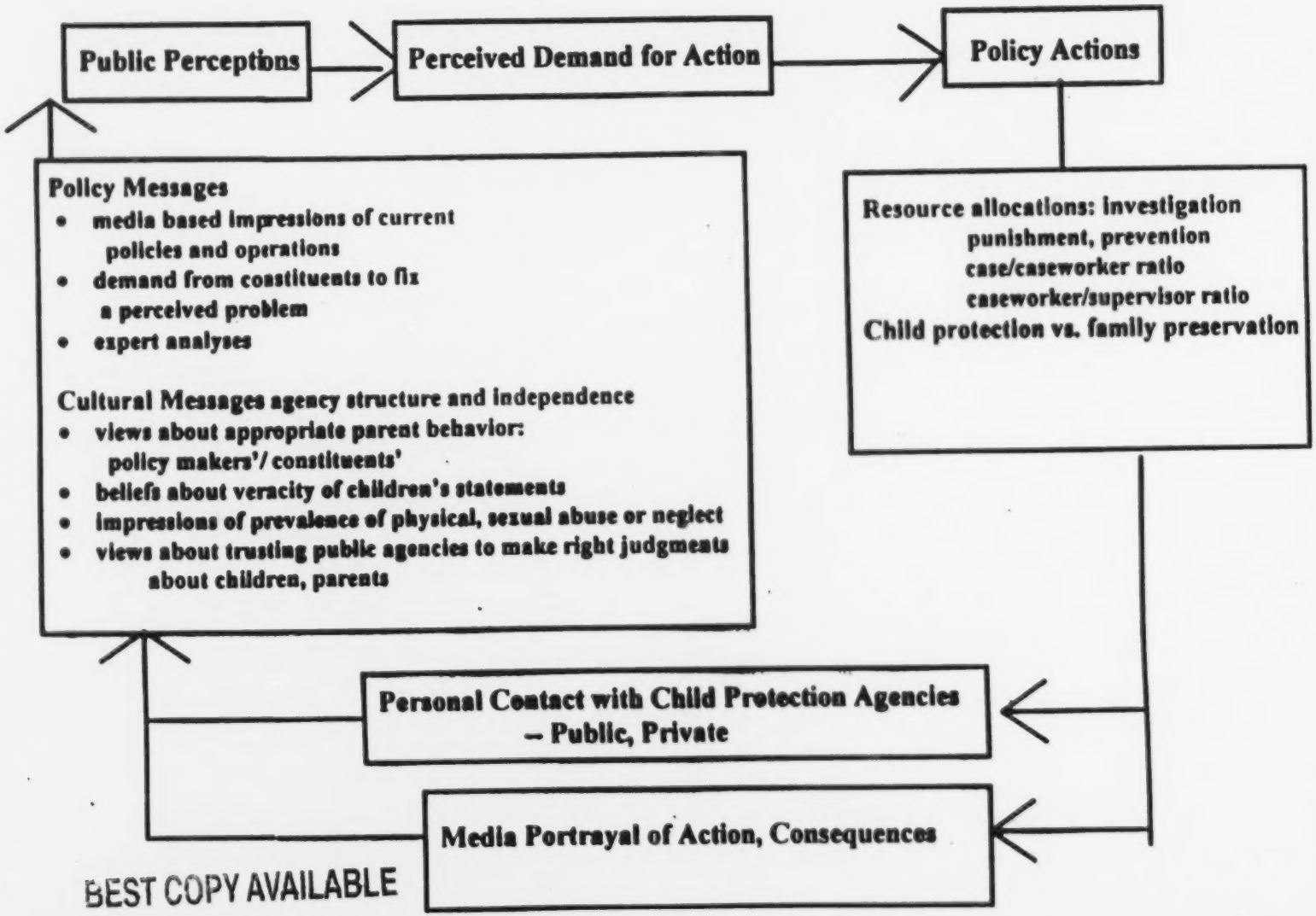
A. What are the positive and negative impacts of media coverage on policy and practice on the child protection system in Washington [California]; what would we like to see happen differently if public attitudes and understanding were more favorable?

B. What broad-based communications strategy could improve child protection ?

C. How will we know if the strategy is working?

To frame our issues we specified the following simplified model of the relationship among public communication, public opinion and public policy.

Relating Public Opinion To Public Policy


Public Perceptions
Perceived Demand for Action
Policy Actions
Policy Messages
• media based impressions of current policies and operations
• demand from constituents to fix a perceived problem
• expert analyses
Cultural Messages agency structure and independence
• views about appropriate parent behavior: policy makers'/ constituents'
• beliefs about veracity of children's statements
• impressions of prevalence of physical, sexual abuse or neglect
• views about trusting public agencies to make right judgments about children, parents
Resource allocations: investigation
punishment, prevention
case/caseworker ratio
caseworker/supervisor ratio
Child protection vs. family preservation
Personal Contact with Child Protection Agencies -- Public, Private
Media Portrayal of Action, Consequences

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This model suggests that it is important to distinguish between two types of messages conveyed to the public and to policy-makers. One type of message is directly policy relevant, containing specific information or analysis about the performance of public agencies or officials. The second type of message conveys information or stimulates an emotional response relevant to the broader context in which policy is set. Thus, in the case of child protection, views about what types of parent behavior constitute abuse, and about the relative importance of keeping families intact or protecting children from abuse, set the context in which policy makers act. We will have to look at how both types of messages are conveyed to understand the potential impact of communication on child protection.

Sources of Data:

We examined several sources of data for this study.

- Tapes and notes from meetings and interviews with policy experts -- leaders from state DSHS, legislature, private treatment and protection agencies, national associations, researchers from government and university.

- Tapes of a focus group we convened and reports from other relevant focus groups.

- Review of national, state and county polls with specific content of child protection, abuse, foster care and other relevant topics.

- Review of media coverage: Seattle Times, LA Times. National magazines.

Our limited time and resources did not allow exhaustive data compilation or analysis. However, we were able to assess several sources of data which, taken together, allow us to set the parameters of the problem, to clarify concepts and to operationalize variable for more in-depth analysis in the next phase.

We conducted two types of activities in parallel, periodically cross checking the two.

One line of inquiry was a series of discussions with child protection experts. We twice brought together leading Washington experts [several of whom are nationally known experts] from public and private agencies with University scholars. We met with a statewide gathering of child protection service supervisors to obtain their views. We conducted a focus group session of non-professionals who are interested and active in children's issues to test their reactions to samples of media coverage and their perception of how child protection services are perceived in the community. In other instances we had individual meetings or telephone conversations with experts to gather their views. Our major purposes in talking to experts in child protection was to get their perceptions about the nature of media coverage, in what specific ways they experience it driving policies and practices in child protection, and their suggestions for what types of media messages they would like the public and policy-makers to receive.

The second line of inquiry was to gather quantitative information of two types:

- the focus of media coverage of child abuse, neglect, protection and related issues
- public opinion about what constitutes abuse or neglect and appropriate responses.

To assess media coverage, we obtained computer files of daily coverage by The Seattle Times (1991-1995) and the Los Angeles Times (1985- 1995). We computed the frequency of coverage of different relevant topics and drew samples of the stories for further analysis. We also selected a series of stories which we judged to illustrate responsible coverage of the issues to use in future training sessions.

We subscribed to the Roper POLL service, which provided access to a data bank of public opinion polls on a wide variety of topics over the last 25 years. We commissioned special cross-tabulations of one of the reported polls. However, we discovered that while expensive, the data set delivered did not include appropriate documentation, statistics or frequencies; nor was it delivered in a timely fashion. Therefore, these analyses remain at a preliminary stage.

We also identified several state and county level public opinion studies in that national literature, as well as a poll of citizens in Santa Clara County, California supplied by one of our participants. Very useful information was contained in a set of surveys conducted by Washington State DSHS, Division of Child and Family Services and supplied by the author, who participated in our sessions. DCFS surveyed a sample of individuals who refer clients to child protective services as well as a sample of clients, to test their reactions to the service system.

We also examined statistics on the rates of referral and acceptance of child abuse and neglect cases in Washington to link public opinion and media coverage to actual trends in the service system.

Policy and Practice Changes Desired by Professionals

An effective communication strategy must be built on a clear vision of the policy changes sought by the communicators. We therefore pressed child protection experts to tell us what they would like to achieve in terms of improved policies and practices. We found that while there is general agreement on the goal of child protection among them, there is significant disagreement about specific goals and the impact of sensationalized media coverage on their personal and institutional agendas. We also asked how better media coverage and public understanding would improve the chance of desired policies being adopted and implemented. There was agreement that responsible media coverage would help achieve the following policy improvements:

- Different Spending and Staff Priorities; less emphasis on preventing the relatively few deaths that occur, and more focus on broad-scale family support and prevention of abuse, neglect.
- Improving the Foster Care and Court Systems
- Improving DSHS/DCFS Practices and Resources
- Enhancing Community Involvement in Child Protection and Family Support
- Better Accountability, both Administrative Better Outcomes For Kids

Different Priorities: Deaths vs Family Support/Prevention

There was considerable discussion about the media attention to child deaths and the implied standard of zero death toleration. It was noted that no other profession holds itself to zero deaths among high risk groups as a standard. Participants felt that since we all desire no deaths to children, it would be difficult to communicate this reality, but that professionals have a duty to be straight-forward with the public about what is achievable. It was felt that disproportionate media attention to relative rare deaths (about 15 per year, compared to 83,500 children referred) required the state agency to devote a disproportionate share of time and resources to investigating a few cases at the expense of providing appropriate prevention and early intervention for the large number of children involved in abuse or neglect situations.

The desired effect on practice is to free caseworkers to be more aggressive and creative about choosing interventions to protect and nurture the child, rather than just that which is most likely to avoid death. In particular, professionals desire more emphasis on and allocation of resources to family support, with less focus on investigations. It was noted that it is particularly important to shift resources to preventing neglect, which is the most rapidly growing complaint.

DSHS participants felt it was important to communicate that they are much more willing to be experimental and open to change than the Department has been in the past. They would like recognition and support as they try a variety of approaches, such as out-stationing CPS staff in public schools and police stations.

Improve Foster Care and Court Systems

The professional group placed a high priority on improving the operation of both foster care and juvenile court systems. A top priority is permanency planning, helping foster kids care about their own futures. The current system is characterized by serial relationships between kids and adults. This should be shifted to greater continuity, with better efforts to stay in touch with all the adults involved in children's lives. Children spend too much time in the court system, and it is believed that changes in statutes will be required to achieve a higher rate of permanent placement.

It was argued that for this to happen, the foster care system must be qualitatively upgraded, and achieve a higher level of respect in the community. Foster parents are currently being demoralized by the negative media attention to a few abusive families. While "most do absolutely fantastic work," they get little thanks and share the public blame of wrongdoers. This makes it difficult to recruit foster parents. Caseworkers noted that they dread calls at "5 pm on Friday," when they are faced with an emergency situation and no available placements. They also noted that religious groupies are taking advantage of this situation and encouraging families to take in foster children as a method of proselytizing their beliefs.

DSHS/DCFS Improvements and Resources

There was an understandable emphasis on the level and deployment of resources within the state Dept. of Social and Health Services, since in Washington they provide the bulk of child protection services. While there was a desire for more funding to reduce caseloads, this was not the top item on the professionals' agenda. However, there was a clear feeling that without reducing caseloads, tragedies would recur and continue to distort the public view and thereby distort policies affecting children's services[1].

A major desire of the experts is to improve relationships among CPS, services available in the community and the children. The surveys conducted by DCFS revealed a major lack of services as judged both by referring agencies and by the clients themselves (60% of each said clients did not receive needed services). The participants discussed this as a coordination and linkage issue. However, it is not clear whether sufficient services exist for the growing number of families involved in abuse and neglect.

Participants stressed the need to work on quality improvement and assure delivery of a "quality product" by both public and private agencies involved in child protection. The quality emphasis was translated directly to the caseworker level in the form of technical assistance and training.

Technical assistance is desired to deal with special cases, particularly across counties. It was observed that complex cases often require expertise that is available in one county and not in others. Since these are rare, non-routine cases, it is not necessary to build expertise in all offices. Rather, it is desired to have a method for sharing or deploying specialized expert resources

[1] NOTE: Gov's request, media and legislative reactions

around the state as needed. Related to technical assistance is a desire for appropriate staff training on how to do a good family assessment. The schools who are training staff are seen to need improved competence in dealing with complex family solutions.

Adequate Funding

Child protection experts both inside and outside public agencies consider them underfunded. Interestingly, public opinion polls and surveys indicate that the public shares this perception. They believe that money is required to pay for effective teams who can both work with children and families and be responsive to public requests. This would entail increasing agency budgets to allow enough caseworkers, home support specialists, clerical staff and paraprofessionals.

Community Partnerships

Experts believe that the state Dept. of Social and Health Services is too isolated from the communities they serve. This take two forms. First, private agency leaders believe that DSHS caseworkers are tending to "going it alone," failing to develop alliances with local agencies. In our discussions there was clear evidence of poor communication and some degree of resentment between public and private agency personnel. Second, community members are not drawn into discussions of challenging situations or kept well informed of what is happening with families in their communities. Then, when something goes awry, there is no base of understanding or goodwill to work from. Some suggested improvements include:

- Generate community involvement and information sharing. Keep people current. Increase visibility of local offices, promote local ownership. Arrange for members of the press to follow a community team and learn about specific ways to help.

- Involve the community more in solving these problems. Use neighbors as resources for family support and prevention.

- Become allies with volunteers, such as guardian ad litems [CASA/GALs]. There are lots of people out there who want to be involved with families. "Don't want to be a foster parent . . . maybe a foster aunt ?"

The community-involvement notion of improved practice clearly began to move the discussion away from simply generating more resources, to linking resources through improved communication with the public in a way where the media are only a part of the communication process. It is unclear whether effective community linkages can be maintained with current strained resources and a perception that state caseworkers are overwhelmed trying to avoid crises. There may need to be a combination of increased resources and redeployment of existing staff, so that community linkages are seen as part of each caseworker's core function, rather than as a nice addition or the task of a community outreach specialist.

Accountability Issues

Child protection experts see a need for substantial improvements in accountability. This is seen as a two way process. Better information systems and research are seen as necessary for both provider accountability and community accountability. Providers of service need to be accountable for the quality of outcomes they produce. It was noted that there are many apparently ineffective programs in place which receive public funding. However, there is not sufficient evaluation data available to prove the inefficiency and de-fund entrenched programs. Similarly, the Department has just begun systematically mapping the deployment of resources against the rates of needs in different communities, and finding a major mismatch. In addition to holding providers accountable, the community needs to be accountable for getting involved in preventing or intervening with family problems. Good data are needed to demonstrate the need for community involvement and commitment of resources. It was noted that there are potential media hooks to skillful use of data and evaluation, so that accountability can become a tool for mobilization, rather than a threat to public servants.

CPS Worker Burnout

Burnout in child protective service workers has been well documented (Fryer, et al., 1988; Savicki & Cooley, 1994). Because CPS workers tend to carry a heavy caseload, with exposure to extremely negative situations and often hostile clients, they are at especially high risk for developing burnout. The result is thought to be reduced job effectiveness and high levels of turnover in front-line workers (Savicki & Cooley, 1994).

A 1988 national survey conducted by the Kempe Center found that child protective service workers are generally dissatisfied with their working conditions and are likely to have developed an attitude of resignation, with many reporting avoidance of client contact (Fryer, et al., 1988). Almost two-thirds of respondents reported often feeling as if they could do nothing to help their clients, and almost half (47.7%) said they often avoided client contact. Likewise, almost one-third reported difficulty even listening to clients. Almost two-thirds of all workers felt overworked and under compensated, with less than half predicting long-term service. Most discouraging, workers with the most experience in the field expressed the most dissatisfaction, and were more regretful they had ever entered the field (Fryer, et al., 1988).

Burnout is thought to be mitigated by peer support, supervisory support, continuing education opportunities, and a sense of autonomy or control (among other factors). About a third of the workers in the Kempe Center study reported receiving no specialized training prior to assuming their caseload, while another third reported receiving less than 40 hours (1 week) of special training (Fryer, et al, 1988). More than half said they did not have access to the professional literature, and 39.1% did not feel they had adequate access to clinical consultation. Only a little more than a third of the workers reported membership in a professional society (e.g., NASW), and exactly half reported having access to a multi-disciplinary team (Fryer, et al., 1988). Under these conditions, the accelerated onset of burnout should come as no surprise.

Indeed, workers who were part of a multidisciplinary team and who were satisfied with both their access to and expertise of their supervisors, were generally more satisfied with their working conditions, indicated an intention to stay in the field, and reported being eager to come to work every day. They were also less likely to report avoiding client contact, or having difficulty concentrating on client problems, although these findings only neared significance (Fryer, et al., 1988).

Perhaps the most unusual finding from the Kempe Center study was that in spite of the above, 86% of the workers also reported confidence in their own skills and the quality of their service. This seems to be at odds with their reported perception that they can do little or nothing to help their clients.

In their 1994 longitudinal study of burnout in child protective services workers, Savicki & Cooley also found that emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of clients, and sense of personal accomplishment all worsened over the course of an eighteen-month period (Savicki & Cooley, 1994). This finding is contrary to the "resource building" model which suggests social service workers develop increasingly sophisticated coping mechanisms as they gain experience in their area. These caseworkers were new to CPS, but virtually all of them had at least five years of experience in the social services. Savicki and Cooley argue, as do others, that child protective services may be a "qualitatively unique job," and coping skills that are effective in other areas of practice simply may not generalize (Savicki & Cooley, 1994).

It is clear that burnout is a critical issue in the child protection field, leading to reduced efficiency, and high rates of attrition. Until this problem is addressed, it is likely that child protective services will struggle to retain experience, effective staff. To the extent that media coverage focuses simply on negative aspects of state agencies and their staff, they contribute to burnout and reduce the quality of services received by children and families.

Figure 1. Child Protection Agency Perception of the Media

Negative

- media is a business and bad new sells
- reportage focuses on sensational cases, obscures the pattern of complex family dynamics driving more representative situations
- lack of media resources inhibits careful reporting, verification of facts
- talk radio: character assassination, little regard for facts;
  personal attacks and jamming of phone lines gives influence beyond limited listenership
- disproportionate reporting of state agency failures demoralizes staff and adds to "burnout"

Positive

- raise public awareness of child abuse and needs for prevention, protection
- referrals go up, calls go up (but we don't get additional staff)
- individual success stories:
  – I will never hit my kid again, "Sunday's child" to adopt
- there are some good, conscientious reporters on the kids beat
- possible to have community of non-profits support government agencies under attack
- force us to re-examine policies and practices – be accountable to community

National Perspective on the Media by Child Protection Experts: A New Backlash ?

There seems to be considerable agreement amongst child protection experts that the media coverage of child abuse issues was initially quite supportive of the child advocacy movement, and was actually instrumental in raising public awareness. David Hechler, writing about the initial media treatment of child sexual abuse in *The Battle and the Backlash*, argued that there were many articles that gave the issue careful examination in the late seventies and early eighties. At the time, the media gave the movement a loud voice, regularly interviewing the experts, and running special "pro-child" features, seemingly without challenging the experts' assertions. As Hechler writes, "When they said the country was besieged by sexual abuse epidemic, they were not contradicted" (Hechler, p. 6). Although there were also sensational stories, apparently these were not the norm.

John E.B. Myers, a prominent attorney associated with the child advocacy movement, also characterizes the early media coverage as supportive or favorable to the movement, as does David Finkelhor, one of the earliest child sexual abuse experts (Myers, p. 87 and p. 1). Today, however, they argue that the trend has been reversed. As Myers writes, "Reporting on child abuse is increasingly critical of the child protection system. Coverage of child sexual abuse is especially vitriolic" (Myers, p. 86). Myers uses examples of *Time* and *Newsweek* cover stories from 1983 and 1993, respectively, to demonstrate the reversal. The 1983 *Time* article advocates breaking down the "'walls of silence'" surrounding intimate violence, and criticizes society's denial of the problem, not the child protection system (Myers, p. 87). The 1993 *Newsweek* cover story is about the Souzas, convicted of sexually abusing their grandchildren, and asks the question, "'When does the fight to protect our kids go too far?'" (Myers, p. 10).

Hechler pinpoints the moment of this reversal as the media coverage of the Jordan, Minnesota case, in which twenty-four adults were accused of operating a "sex ring," and sexually abusing their own as well as others' children. According to Hechler, this was one of the first bizarre cases to emerge, and the first one to attract extraordinary media attention. When the prosecution failed to prove its case, ultimately dropping the charges against the remaining defendants, the trend of almost exclusively positive coverage came to an end (Hechler, p.9). We a potential interesting parallel in Washington State. A highly publicized set of trials for operating a "sex ring" in Wenatchee have resulted in many acquittals, and added to a perception of incompetence by state investigators and added to the political pressure for restructuring DSHS/DCFS.

Interestingly enough, this trend seems linked to the public discovery of child sexual abuse, not child physical abuse or neglect. While we still see stories that criticize the slowness of the response to child abuse (reminiscent of the 1983 *Time* cover story) these stories tend to be about child battering and homicide, not child sexual abuse, and now it is CPS that to blame, not society as a whole. According to Myers, the more common (certainly the more visible) story is the one that tells of a child protection system "out of control," seeing child sexual abuse wherever it looks, and destroying families in its "witch-hunt" (Myers, p. 90). Using quotations to demonstrate, Myers argues that the child protection system is portrayed as encouraging "mass hysteria," and

child protection professionals are cast as Nazis, McCarthyite persecutors, the KGB, etc. (Myers, p. 93).

To date, no one has provided empirical support for these observations, but if they are accurate, there would seem to be cause for concern. Especially troubling is the notion that the public furor over child sexual abuse would also negatively impact, or even overshadow, the public's awareness and concern regarding other types of child abuse and neglect.

Media Impact on Public Policy

Understanding media coverage is critical, because so many Americans get their information about public affairs from the media, particularly television news.

The Roper Organization has monitoring American attitudes in a periodic update called "America's Watching--Public Attitudes Toward Television." The poll is conducted in person with 2000 participants. Their primary question was asked in 1989, 1992, 1993, and 1995.

> "I'd like to ask you where you usually get most of your news about what's going on in the world today--from newspapers, or radio, or television, or magazines, or talking with people, or where?"

Roper changed the response options in 1995 so direct comparison of the same questions is not possible. What is clear from the sample in this poll is that television is the primary source of news. Newspapers are second. Radio was third, but it is hard top specify it in 1995. The Times Mirror Study suggests some differences by social class. More educated and affluent participants are more likely to read newspapers and to claim them as a source of news.

Source of News	1995	1993	1992	1989
Television only	45%			
Newspapers only	14%			
TV & Newspapers	21%			
Newspaper & not TV	3%			
Media other than TV or Newspapers	10%			
Don't know/No Ans.	2%			1%
Television		69%	81%	66%
Newspapers		43%	35%	36%
Radio		16%	14%	14%
Magazines		4%	4%	4%
People		6%	6%	4%

Direct contact with "people" scores quite low (4-6%). However, when you ask about "what is going on in the world," this is likely to imply major national and international events, rather than direct experiences in day to day life. Given the large number of households contacted by CPS each year, it is likely that opinions about child protection are more greatly influenced by "people" than reflected in this poll response.

It is interesting and of concern that television is also the most "trusted" source of news in all of the Roper Polls. Comparing television and newspapers on the question of "conflicting reports, 50%+ chose television with 20%+ choosing newspapers. In the classic formulation of Daniel Schorr, "If you are not on television, you don't exist." This is of concern, since newspaper stories tend to provide more context and reflect more of the complexities of a family situation than does television news. There have been several high quality, in depth 30 or 60 minute specials on issues of foster care, child abuse and protection. However, these tend to be viewed on one or two occasions. While these specials may inform and influence a few policy makers, a large number of sensationalized news stories night after night probably does more to color public impressions. We see this in surveys of what people have heard about abuse or neglect:

- 65% respondents in the 1985 LAT poll said they had read something or talked to somebody about the subject of child sexual abuse in the last month (LAT, 1985).

- 91% of respondents in a 1991 Kentucky survey said that they had read about a child dying from child abuse (Dhooper, et al, 1991).

What does media coverage of Child Protection issues look like ?

Our major quantitative analysis was devoted to understanding the content and emphasis of current media coverage of child protection issues, so that we could compare it to experts' perceptions of the nature of problems and effective policies and practice. As noted above, we undertook a computer analysis of daily coverage in The Seattle Times and the Los Angeles Times. The Seattle Times data were available from 1991-1995; the Los Angeles Times data were available for the ten year period, 1985-1995. For television, we examined examples of both sensationalized news coverage and in-depth documentaries. We also reviewed the scant literature available about media treatment of these issues and its impact. In summary, we found that mass media:

- Emphasize a few sensational cases involving death or abuse of a child, or occasionally death of an adult

- Focus on assigning blame for death within government agencies, rather than exploring causes within families, individuals and communities.

- Emphasize parent rights over child protection (in California)

- Are preoccupied with sexual abuse more than physical abuse, and rarely deal with neglect

- Miss the most stories as indicated by both expert judgment and a review of the rates of incidence of different forms of abuse and neglect. The missing stories are:

  - The small proportion of cases which reach the critical stage, compared with the huge number of cases of abuse and neglect which successfully receive early intervention and the need for large scale prevention.

  - The complex family dynamics involved in abuse and neglect cases.

  - The resources and services required to intervene and support families with complex problems.

  - The importance of family and community responsibility to support families, prevent abuse or neglect.

We will first describe the actual referral patterns for child abuse and neglect in Washington State, which are parallel to those of California and the U.S., and then compare them to the patterns of media coverage. The intent is to see whether a reader of viewer of news coverage would receive an accurate portrayal of the rates of occurrence of physical and sexual abuse, neglect and child death from the rate at which they are reported in the news.

The Facts: Washington data on referrals to C. P. S.

83,500 referrals in 1994; Rate of 1 in 13 kids age 0-5
Substantiated and accepted = 55,000 cases
Neglect = 50 % = 27,000 cases, greatest increase
Physical abuse = 29% = 16,000 cases
Sexual abuse = 13% = 7,000 cases
Deaths due to abuse, neglect = 15 per year

The most important fact to understand is that child abuse and neglect are common acts affecting a large percentage of the population. There are two ways we can measures abuse and neglect. One is the annual *incidence* of events which occur; the other is the *prevalence* in the population of individuals who have experienced abuse or neglect. We do not have high quality data for either incidence or prevalence, but we do have enough to determine that these are far from rare occurrences. Annual incidence is usually reported, because it is calculated directly from administrative records, and is useful for planning staffing and services. However, for program purposes and understanding the societal implications of abuse an neglect, prevalence is the preferable measure, since it tells what proportion of the population has actually experienced abuse or neglect and is likely to need service or have other outcomes affected by that experience.

The best state level measure of prevalence available is a survey conducted by the state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Department of Health in 1992. This survey asked a large sample of 8, 10 and 12th grade students whether they had ever been physically or sexually abused. The results were quite striking. More than one in three 12th grade females said they had been physically or sexually abused at some time in their life: 17 percent physical and sexual, 8 percent sexual only, 11 percent physical abuse only. The numbers for males were somewhat lower, 16 percent total, with 4% physical and sexual, 4% sexual only, 8 percent physical only. These data are consistent with national sample surveys (see Finkelhor, 1994, for an excellent review article). While there may be reasons to consider these overestimates (there is not verification; the definitions of abuse are quite broad), there are equally compelling reasons to consider them underestimates (adolescents are usually reluctant to discuss abuse; the survey excluded school dropouts, who are known to have experienced a disproportionately high rate of abuse). They are consistent with the results of surveys asking adult women about the same issues. These estimates imply that millions of Washington youth and adults may have experienced abuse as children. No figures are available on the prevalence of neglect.

Referral rates to Child Protective Services suggest that neglect occurs more frequently than abuse. The total CPS referral rate in Washington for 1994 equally one in 13 children ages 0-6. Of 83,500 children (73,000 cases) referred to CPS in 1994, 55,000 cases (which may include more than one child) were accepted. Many others were "screened out" which would have been accepted for action if there had been sufficient staff to deal with more than the most dangerous cases. The pattern listed above is consistent with national reports.

As with the prevalence data, the 1 in 13 referral rate of incidence could be considered an over-estimate since many of the cases are not substantiated. However, it could also be an underestimate, since much abuse and neglect goes unreported.

While the data on incidence and prevalence may not be highly accurate, they are of sufficient quality to give us an order of magnitude from which we may draw several critical conclusions, which serve as a template for judging media coverage.

- Child abuse and neglect are common occurrences, affecting more than a quarter of all children.

- Child neglect accounts for the largest share of reported cases, and has been growing most rapidly in recent years.

- Physical abuse is quite common for both boys and girls.

- While affecting a substantial proportion of the population, sexual abuse is the smallest of the three categories triggering protective action.

Getting the Story Right? Newspaper coverage . . .

When we compare actual newspaper coverage in to this pattern, we get a different picture. There is a focus on deaths, rather than either abuse or neglect, despite the small number of deaths. In particular, the overall pattern portrayed by frequency of newspaper coverage is:

- Substantial rates of child death from abuse
- Child Abuse is common, neglect is rare
- Sexual, not physical abuse is common.

Specifically, in the LA Times we found an average of 508 stories per year on abuse and only 95 on neglect. [2] Of these, 322 were concerned with sexual abuse and only 42 with physical abuse. Similarly, in The Seattle Times we encountered 391 stories abuse and only 39 on neglect. Of these, 86 discussed incidents of sexual abuse and only 12 reported physical abuse. Ratios of events to newspaper coverage indicates that the media give more coverage to the rarer, more unusual and therefore more "newsworthy" events. In this case, newspaper coverage exactly reversed the balances between abuse and neglect, and between physical and sexual abuse occurring in the real world.

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[2] Our computer search identified all stories containing any of the following words: child abuse, abuse of chidren, child exual abuse, child molesttion, sexual child abuse, sexually abused child, sexually moleted child, child phsycial abuse, physically abused child, battered child, cild batterer, beat!child or child!beat, child fatality, child death, child murederer and child abuse, child!batterer! or child physical abuse; child neglect! or neglect!child; foster care, foster home care or foster family or foster arents or foster!child or foster home; child protection, child protect!.

Number of Stories in the Los Angeles Times and the Seattle Times from 1985-1995 Mentioning child abuse and related terms*

Term	Paper	Average
Child Abuse (1)	LAT	508
	ST	391
Child Sexual Abuse (2)	LAT	322
	ST	86
Child Physical Abuse (3)	LAT	42
	ST	12
Child Death (4)	LAT	19
	ST	154
Child Neglect (5)	LAT	95
	ST	39
Foster Care (6)	LAT	307
	ST	193
Child Protection (7)	LAT	49
	ST	84
Menendez	LAT	167 total
	ST	
Jackson	LAT	153 total
	ST	

*Source: Nexis and Seattle Times CR-ROM

1 Child abuse, abuse of children
2 Child sexual abuse, child molestation, sexual child abuse, sexually abused child or sexually molested child
3 Child physical abuse, physically abused child, battered child, child batterer, beat! child or child! beat!
4 Child fatality!, child death, child beat! death, child murderer and child abuse, child! batterer! or child physical abuse
5. Child neglect! or neglect! child
6 Foster care, foster home care or foster family or foster parents or foster! child or foster home
7 child protection, child protect!

Numbers of Stories in the Los Angeles Times and the Seattle Times from 1985-95 mentioning child abuse and related terms*

*Source: Nexis and Seattle Times CD-Rom

		1985	9186	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Average
Child Abuse (1)	LAT	402	376	325	430	513	635	519	489	566	480	344	508
	ST							350	281	364	466	144	391
Child Sexual Abuse (2)	LAT	318	272	262	212	318	398	273	205	459	357	143	322
	ST							95	105	84	110	36	86
Child Physical Abuse (3)	LAT	42	32	25	46	53	38	51	46	44	38	24	42
	ST							7	14	16	13	12	12
Child Death (4)	LAT	11	12	10	30	16	13	18	24	19	16	11	19
	ST							132	150	173	230	81	154
Child Neglect (5)	LAT	73	75	82	75	95	110	88	78	103	112	71	95
	ST							46	54	50	36	11	39
Foster Care (6)	LAT	212	237	209	273	320	334	285	320	322	334	228	307
	ST							229	214	201	217	106	193
Child Protection (7)	LAT	26	48	32	51	37	63	50	63	44	35	38	49
	ST							109	87	88	98	36	84
Menendez	LAT									111	44	12	167 total
	ST												
Jackson	LAT									77	44	19	153 total
	ST									188	101	31	

1 Child abuse, abuse of children
2 Child sexual abuse, child molestation, sexual child abuse, sexually abused child or sexually molested child
3 Child physical abuse, physically abused child, battered child, child batterer, beat! child or child! beat!
4 Child fatality!, child death, child beat! death, child murderer and child abuse, child! batterer! or child physical abuse
5. Child neglect! or neglect! child
6 Foster care, foster home care or foster family or foster parents or foster! child or foster home
7 child protection, child protect!

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We observed quite different patterns of newspaper coverage in the two states. In Washington we found a greater focus on child death, accounting for an average of 154 stories in the Seattle Times over the five years, but an average of only 19 stories in the LA Times. It is hard to tell whether this reflects the special history of editorial concern in Washington since the highly publicized Eli Creekmore child death case in 1987, or whether there is a greater public concern with protecting children among Washington readers. In California, we found more focus on foster care and concern for the rights of parents whose children were removed from their custody. This subject accounted for 307 stories in the LA Times, but only 193 in the Seattle Times[3]. Further, in the LA Times there was greater emphasis on sexual abuse stories relative to all abuse stories than in Washington.

Comparison Case of Elisa Izquierdo: A Child Dies in New York City

On November 22, 1995, six-year-old Elisa Izquierdo died from a brain hemorrhage caused by a blow to the head. Her mother was charged with murder. The autopsy report revealed evidence of sexual abuse. Elisa was one of six children in the family. The other five children were place in foster care after their mother was charged with Elisa's murder.

Occurring in a major media market, the story of Elisa Izquerierdo's death unleashed a flurry of continuing coverage. A Lexis-Nexis search with Elisa Izquerierdo's name there were slightly more than 400 citations from major papers (290), magazine (13) and the broadcast (68) scripts database through February 15, 1996. The initial stories were primarily crime reports. Soon there were stories about the public agencies that were responsible for protecting children like Elisa from abuse. Eventually, there were long stories reviewing the whole child protection system in New York City and state. There were newspaper editorials and broadcast commentaries.

A special commission was appointed to review the death of Elisa as well as other child deaths in New York. The mayor of New York and state legislators began looking at the coming legislative session in Albany as an opportunity to change laws.

The most immediate legislative change was a revision of rules for protecting confidentiality of clients in the child protective system. That law was passed and signed during early February. No policies concerning the resources of Child Protective Services to adequately serve large numbers of cases or to provide needed service were enacted, despite discussion of high caseloads in major magazine stories.

[3] We are still examining the interaction among stories labeled foster care and labled child abuse to determine the extent to which foster care storied reflect coverage of abuse in foster homes.

Magazine Coverage

Assuming that magazine stories could be longer and perhaps more able to treat the complexity of these issues, we used Lexis/Nexis to search the contents of nine mass circulation magazines published from 1985 to 1995[4]: Time, Newsweek, People, US News and World Report, Ladies Home Journal, Parents' Magazine, McCalls, Ebony and Playboy. On average, there were fewer than one article per year per magazine touching on these topics. Most were feature articles, often prompted by a sensational case. We postponed further in-depth analysis until we can secure a larger sample.

Current Public Opinions About Child Abuse and Protection

We wanted to examine whether these patterns of reporting accurately reflected the public's concern for these different issues. We were able to obtain results of several national polls, as well as state and community surveys from Alabama, Iowa, Kentucky, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia. These were taken at various times between 1985 and 1995. There is no particular reason to expect opinions in Washington to deviate substantially from national trends on this issue. We note, however, that there is a major need for better public opinion data on child abuse and child protection. While we found several polls with a few questions on the subject, we found that there were inconsistent questions, definitions and sampling methods used over time. Without consistent methodology, it is difficult to have confidence in the meaning of responses or differences from year to year. However, as with the incidence and prevalence measures, some of the data are so striking in the order of magnitude that we feel comfortable in using them as a rough gauge of the priorities of the public. The clear picture across whatever polls and surveys we have found, is that the public places top priority on the protection of children.

We found that:

- 63 percent favor removal to protect child if there is a suspicion of abuse (Roper, 1995)
- the public tends to be less tolerant of abusive behavior than the criteria in state laws; for example, 69 percent classify repeated slapping, hitting as abuse (Roper, 1994)
- 3 times as many worry about guilty perpetrators not being prosecuted than worry about innocent parents being prosecuted unjustly (LA Times Poll, 1985).[5]

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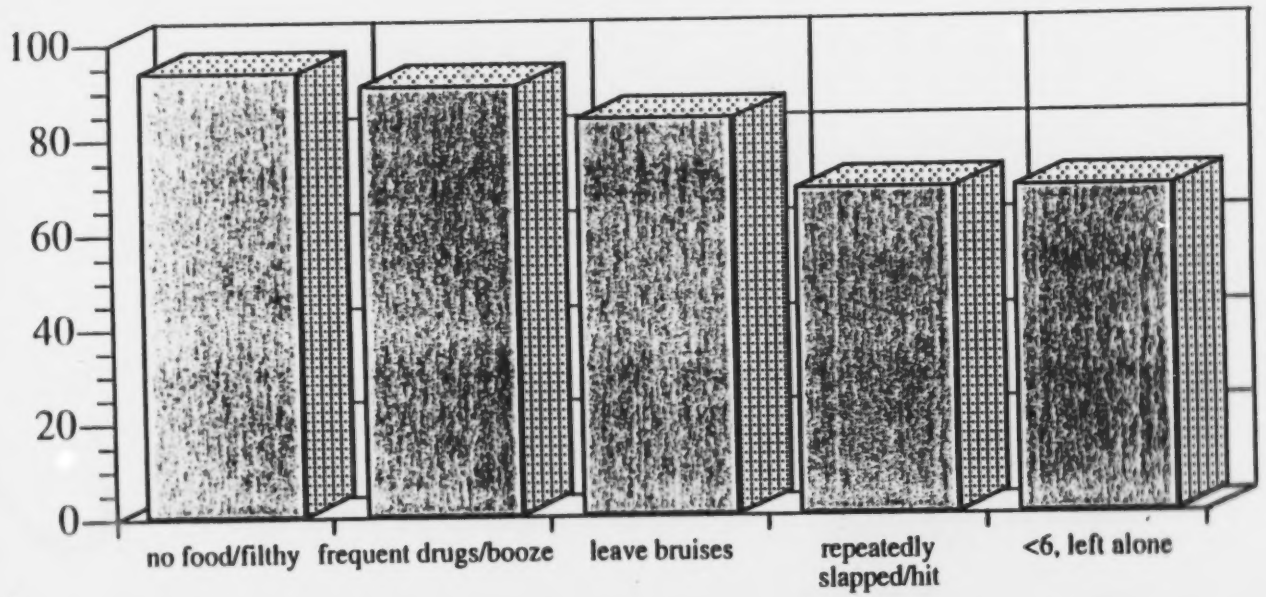
[4] Using the same keywords as in the newspaper search.

[5] These and other polling data would be more informative if we had the capability to ascertain whether there are significant differences in responses between men and women, among people of different ages, religions or ethnic groups. However, the data provided to us by POLL did not allow for such comparisons and responses to our requests for greater detail were daalyed several times. We will provide greater detail in the future.

Abuse & Neglect Confounded

(Roper, 1994):

- It Should be Reported as Abuse or Neglect if (% yes):



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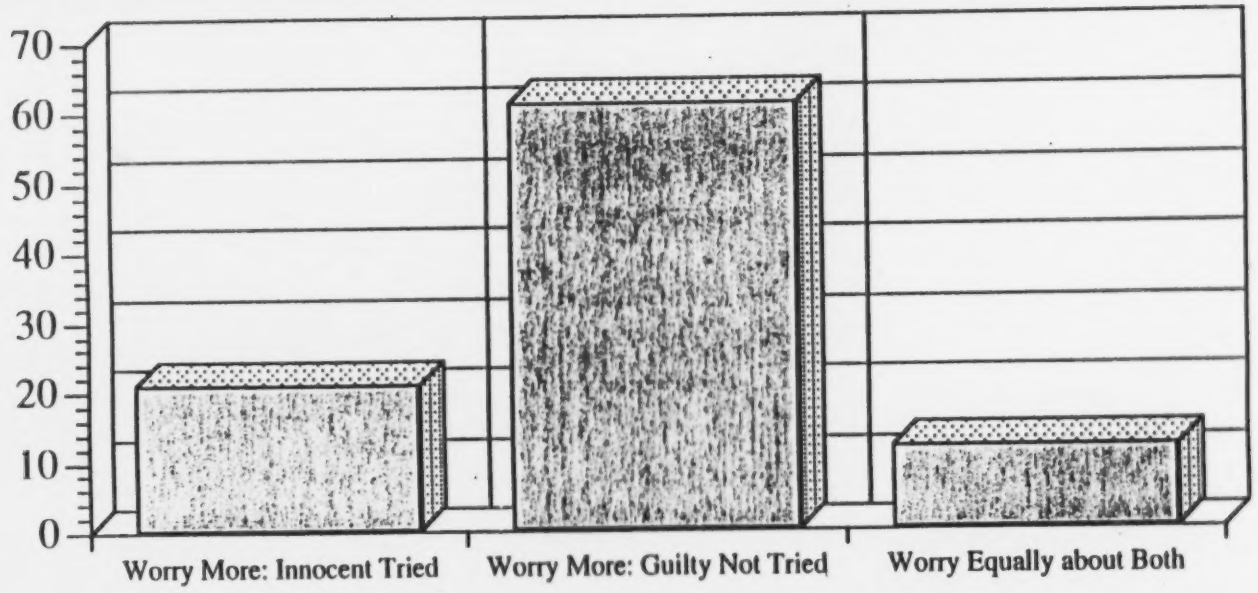
The Public Is More Worried When Guilty are Not Tried:



"Sometimes Innocent People Are Tried For Crimes They Didn't Commit. Other Times, Guilty People are Never Brought to Trial. Which of These Situations Worries You the Most?"

Source: LA Times Poll on Sexual Abuse, 1985

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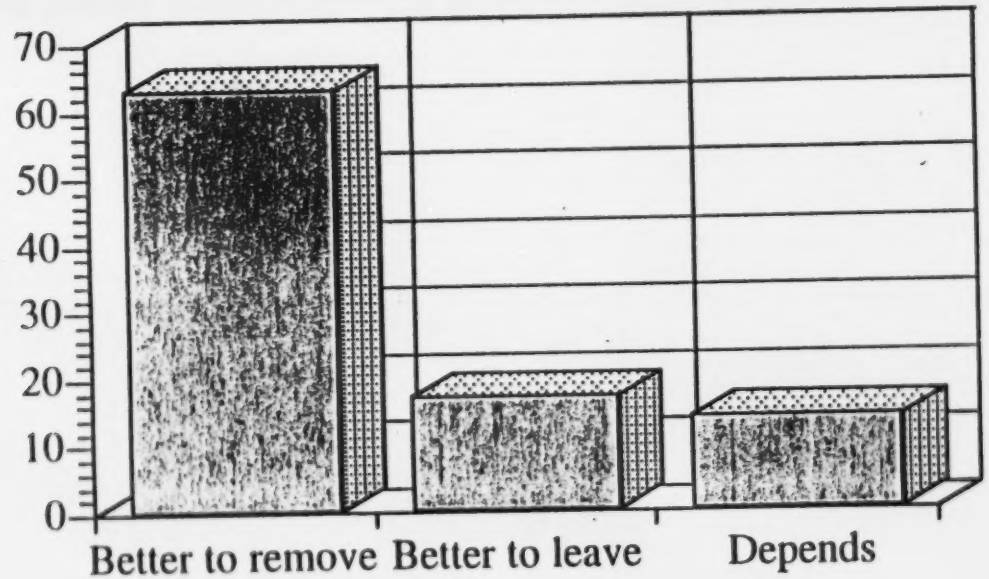
The Public Favors Removal If Abuse Is Suspected



"When authorities have a suspicion that child abuse is going on in a home, do you think it is better to remove the child immediately even if there is a chance that there is no abuse going on, or is it better to leave the child in the home even if there is a chance that abuse would continue?" (Roper, April, 1995)

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We examined a wide variety of polling data to delve below these general areas of agreement, and found that:

- On the whole, Americans employ wide definitions of child abuse and neglect, with the exception of physical punishment, which most continue to support.

- Americans express a strong belief in the harmful and lasting effects of child abuse and neglect, with some ambivalence surrounding the effects of physical punishment.

- Overall, Americans favor some type of criminal prosecution in cases of child abuse and neglect and the majority believe that the criminal justice system is not tough enough in its handling of such cases.

- The majority of Americans do not believe that the societal response to child abuse and neglect has been adequate, although there is evidence to suggest that Americans think the response has improved.

- Americans believe in prevention efforts, and demonstrate a high level of personal commitment to prevention, although there is some evidence of public confusion regarding reporting laws, and the availability of resources.

- By and large, Americans are more concerned with child safety than with parents' rights of family preservation, but there is some evidence of a growing confusion regarding the appropriate scope of the child abuse reporting system.

- The majority of families served by the child protection system seem satisfied, even please, with the services they receive, with the exception of some important, specific complaints.

Attitudes Regarding The Definitions Of Child Abuse & Neglect

On the whole, Americans employ wide definitions of child abuse and neglect, with the exception of physical punishment, which most continue to support.

The public seems to more widely and consistently define child neglect, with 91.7% from Alabama saying that trying to lock up a child is always neglect, while over three-quarters say that not feeding a child is always neglect, and almost two-thirds saying that not giving a child adequate clothing is always neglect (Johnson & Sigler, 1995). A 1994 CNN/USA Today poll found that 94% of respondents believed it should be reported as child abuse or neglect if there is no food in the house and the house is filthy. Ninety-one percent also said that child abuse or neglect should be reported if the parents or adults in the house frequently use illegal drugs or are frequently drunk from alcohol (CNN/USA Today, 1994). Ninety-three percent of those surveyed in Kentucky defined as neglect a mother sending a 6-year-old to school with no money because she spent it on beer and cigarettes (Dhooper, et al., 1991).

The 1985 Los Angeles Times poll on child sexual abuse revealed that the public also employs a wide and consistent definition of child sexual abuse. For example, 88% of respondents defined an attempted sexual act with a child as sexual abuse, even if the act was never completed. Three-quarters of respondents defined indecent exposure and sexual remarks to a child as sexual abuse, and 82% defined taking photographs of a naked child as sexual abuse (Los Angeles Times, 1985).

Perhaps most surprisingly, the public seems to have a very wide definition of emotional abuse, with almost three-quarters of Alabama respondents defining child abuse as telling the child he/she is worthless; almost two-thirds define criticizing the child in front of others as child abuse, and 63% define cursing at the child as emotional abuse (Johnson & Sigler, 1995). In the Kentucky survey, 89% defined as emotional abuse a mother telling her 8-year-old, "I wish you'd never been born" (Dhooper, et al., 1991). A 1986 national poll found that only a little more than half of respondents even thought that most children had loving parents, while a mere 48% though most children were basically happy (Harris, 1986).

Despite a belief by two thirds that repeated spanking or slapping constitutes abuse, there is also substantial support for corporal punishment. For example, a 1994 Gallup poll found that three-quarters of respondents still agree that it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a "good hard spanking," although this is a decrease from the 84% whom agreed in 1984 (Moore, 1994). Men, and older men in particular, are most likely to support this statement. A 1989 USA Today poll found that fully 96% of respondents did not define a parent using his/her hand to spank a child once on the bottom as child abuse, and two-thirds did not define spanking the child 4 or 5 times as child abuse (USA Today, 1989).

In an Alabama survey, three-quarters indicated that hitting a child occasionally with an open hand is only sometimes child abuse, while almost half said that hitting occasionally with a belt or stick is only sometimes child abuse (Johnson & Sigler, 1995). On the other had, hitting occasionally with a fist is always seen as child abuse by 90.8% of respondents (Johnson & Sigler, 1995).

Attitudes Regarding The Effects Of Child Abuse & Neglect

Americans express a strong belief in the harmful and lasting effects of child abuse and neglect, with some ambivalence surrounding the effects of physical punishment.

Child sexual abuse is seen as the most harmful, with fully 96% of those surveyed believing that it causes permanent emotional damage (Los Angeles Times, 1985). Emotional abuse is also seen as quite serious, with three quarters of respondents believing that repeated yelling and swearing causes long-term emotional problems (Daro, 1995). Child abuse and neglect is seen as a major contributor to a variety of societal problems. Seventy-one to eight-five percent of those surveyed in Texas identified child abuse and neglect as contributing to the school dropout rate, the crime problem, the use of drugs by teenagers, teen suicide, teen alcoholism, teen pregnancy and teen prostitution (Teske, 1992).

Americans express more ambivalence about the effects of physical punishment on children. In 1995, less than a third said that physical punishment often leads to injury, while a little more than a third said that it occasionally did (Daro, 1995). Likewise, the Kentucky survey found that respondents were confused about how serious an injury had to be to meet the definition of child abuse, with almost a third believing that it wasn't child abuse if medical attention was not required (Dhooper, et al., 1991).

Attitudes Toward Criminal Prosecution In Child Abuse & Neglect

Overall, Americans favor some type of criminal prosecution in cases of child abuse and neglect and the majority believe that the criminal justice system is not tough enough in its handling of such cases.

As many as 85% of Americans believe that our criminal justice system is not tough enough on child abuse and neglect (Life Magazine, 1992). Likewise, over half of the respondents in a 1989 poll felt that our laws already do enough to protect those accused of child abuse (USA Today, 1989).

Americans do not, however, advocate a blanket policy toward prosecution in such cases. As Americans' endorsements of behaviors as abuse or neglect increase, so do their endorsements of severe penalties (Johnson & Sigler, 1995). More than three-quarters of those surveyed in Texas believed that criminal prosecution is the most appropriate response to child sexual abuse by a parent, but only about half advocated prosecution in cases of child physical abuse, and about a fourth felt it was appropriate in cases of child neglect (Teske, 1992). Almost half of those surveyed see child neglect as a civil court/public welfare matter (Teske, 1992).

The strongest support for criminal prosecution is clearly seen in cases of child sexual abuse. In fact, 61% of those surveyed said that it would worry them more if people guilty of child sexual abuse were never brought to trial than if innocent people were tried for crimes they didn't commit (Los Angeles Times, 1985). Respondents were also more concerned about protecting children from psychological damage when they testify in court, than in protecting the legal rights of defendants. Finally, one-third indicated that child molesters should serve more than twenty years in jail, and 10% advocated the death penalty (Los Angeles Times, 1985).

Public Perceptions Of The Societal Response To Child Abuse and Neglect

The majority of Americans do not believe that the societal response to child abuse and neglect had been adequate, although there is evidence that Americans think the response has improved.

A 1986 national poll found that 63% believed that too little effort had been directed toward the problems of children (Harris, 1986). Sixty-percent of respondents to a 1989 Virginia survey were willing to pay increased taxes to support programs for abused and neglected children (Bradford & O'hare, 1989). A 1994 Nebraska survey found that over two-thirds of respondents believed there was a need for additional services for abused and neglected children, and over three-quarters of respondents identified abused children as the highest priority for services (Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1994).

In the Harris poll, parents were rated the highest in meeting their responsibilities toward children, with just over half saying parents do a good job. Only half said that community organizations were doing a good job. Over two-thirds said federal government was not doing a good job, and two-thirds said local government was not doing a good job (Harris, 1986). A 1989 poll found that three-quarters of Americans though society in general was not doing enough t o protect children from abuse, and over half believed that school were not doing enough (USA Today, 1989).

On the other hand, in 1994, public opinion was almost evenly split as to whether society was doing a good job of dealing with the problem of child abuse (CNN/USA Today, 1994). State government, however, including social workers and the courts, was still seen by 60% as doing a not good or poor job. Another 1994 poll found that just under half rated society, "meaning doctors, teachers, friends, and neighbors," as doing a good job of dealing with child abuse, and just under one-third rated it fair (Moore, 1994). These respondents also gave state government a higher rating, with 60% indicating that state government did a good or fair job.

Attitudes Toward Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention

Americans believe in prevention efforts, and demonstrate a high level of personal commitment to prevention, although there is some evidence of public confusion regarding reporting laws and the availability of resources.

A 1988 national poll found that 92% of respondents believed counseling and therapy for abusive parents would go along way of help somewhat in reducing child abuse; Over three-quarters said that educational programs would do the same (Parents Magazine, 1988). A large majority (79%) believed that expanding the reporting laws, as well as the powers give to law enforcement (78%) and mandated reporters (92%), would go a long way or help somewhat in reducing child abuse. A 1995 national poll also found that fully 79% of respondents believed that a program could be successful in preventing child abuse; only 11% felt that no current program or strategy is effective. (Daro, 1995). More importantly, perhaps, 80% of parents and 67% of

those without children under 18 at home, said they support government funding for home visitation services for new parents (Daro, 1995).

In terms of personal involvement, three-quarters of respondents said that if they witnessed an incident of child abuse, they would report it to the authorities, while one-quarter would talk to the persons involved (Parents Magazine, 1988). In fact, almost half agreed that if someone did witness an obvious act of child abuse and did nothing, they should be held legally responsible for not trying to protect the child.

In a 1991 national poll, an even higher percentage of respondents indicated that they would personally intervene in a case of child abuse. Almost half said they would call the police if there were outward signs of abuse, while about a third would call the local social service or welfare agency, and 15% would talk to the parents (Great American TV Poll, 1991). If the child didn't show outward signs of abuse, only 16% would call the police, but about a third would still call the social service agency, and more than a fifth would talk to the parents.

Over three-quarters of respondents in the Nebraska poll said they would be "very likely" to intervene if they were aware of a child abuse situation (Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1994). In 1995, over half of all respondents, and more than two-thirds of parents, felt they could make a notable contribution to child abuse prevention (Daro, 1995).

In 1994, one national poll asked about actual situations in which respondents had suspected abuse. Over a third of these respondents said they had reported their suspicion to the authorities, while 17% had spoken with the parents. Only 18% did nothing at all (Moore, 1994). The Virginia survey found that 16% had actually reported a suspected case (Bradford & O'Hare, 1989), while the Kentucky survey found that almost a third had reported their suspicions to the authorities (Dhooper, 1991). In 1995, one-quarter of all respondents, and one-third of parents reported having taken personal action in the past 12 months to prevent child abuse (Daro, 1995).

Lastly, there was some evidence that the public is still somewhat confused about their responsibility to report, as well as about what resources are available. In 1991, the Texas survey found that less than half of respondents were aware of any programs in their community where parents could get help if they were concerned about abusing their own children (Teske, 1992). Likewise, less than half of respondents were aware of any parenting programs in their community.

The Kentucky survey found that almost three-quarters of respondents knew they were required to report suspected child abuse, but almost two-thirds incorrectly believed that the law required immediate removal of the child (Dhooper, 1991). And although almost two-thirds knew that they could report child abuse anonymously, 61% did not know that they could not be sued for libel as a result of reporting a case that is not substantiated (Dhooper, 1991).

Attitudes Toward Government Intervention In Child Abuse & Neglect

By and large, Americans are more concerned with child safety than with parents' rights or family preservation, but there is some evidence of a growing confusion regarding the appropriate scope of the child abuse reporting system.

- A survey of Santa Clara County citizens found that:
  - the public puts child protection as top priority
  - the public wants competent, fair CPS workers. they are willing to trust CPS workers about removal of children if they believe they are acting in a professional manner.

- In Washington State's survey of CPS referents, 92% agreed with child removal when ordered.

We noted that the media coverage of child protection issues tends to focus heavily on the role of government agencies. This appears to be mirrored in public opinion. For example, a recent survey commissioned by Children's' Home Society of Washington asked respondents what children's service and advocacy organizations come first to their mind. 41 percent did not recall any at all. The two most often mentioned were Child Protective services (by 11%) and DSHS (by 9%). Leading private service agencies were only mentioned by about three percent each. Clearly, the public associates child protection with government intervention.

Polls consistently show a strong public support for state intervention in abusive families. In 1994, a CNN/USA Today poll found that 70% of respondents believed that repeated slapping or spanking justified temporary removal of the child from the family, while 17% said it justified permanent removal (CNN/USA Today, 1994). Three-quarters supported temporary removal when the child was hit hard enough to leave bruises, and more than one-fifth supported permanent removal. As far as neglect is concerned, 69% supported temporary removal if a child under 6-years-old is left a home alone for several hours, and 12% supported permanent removal (CNN/USA Today, 1994).

Likewise, these respondents strongly preferred placement in an orphanage (78%) or a foster home -- even a series of foster homes -- (71%), to returning the child to the abusive parents (CNN/USA Today, 1994). A 1994 Newsweek poll also found that over half of respondents believed that children who have been seriously abused or neglected by their parents are better off being taken by the state for adoption, foster homes, or orphanages, than "being returned to their families for a second chance with state counseling and monitoring" (Newsweek, 1994).

NCPCA's 1995 survey demonstrated an even stronger public commitment to child safety, with almost three-quarters disagreeing with the statement, "Child welfare workers should always try to keep a child at home with his or her parents regardless of how the parents behave" (Daro, 1995). Almost three-quarters of respondents also indicated that parents whom have seriously injured their children should permanently lose custody of them, and fully 82% agreed with the statement, "Some families are simply too dangerous to be trusted with the care of their children." Likewise, the majority seem to think that the child protection system is less vigilant than it should

be, with more than two-thirds of the respondents believing that too many children die due to insufficient investigation of child abuse and neglect cases (Daro, 1995).

There are a number of contradictory findings, however, which point to a more ambivalent public attitude regarding the appropriate role of the child protection system. For example, about two-thirds of the same respondents agreed that it was possible for child welfare workers to preserve families and protect a child's safety, but somewhat less than half indicated uncertainty about the veracity of most reports of child abuse and neglect (Daro, 1995). Taken together, these findings suggest that the public does have a certain degree of confidence in the system's ability to help, but is perhaps less confident in the system's ability to correctly identify child abuse and neglect.

Attitudes of Population Served by CPS

The majority of families served by CPS seem satisfied, even pleased, with the services they receive, with the exception of some important, specific complaints.

A 1990 Iowa survey of 176 client families found that over half of the respondents awarded workers the highest possible rating on each of the scale's categories (friendly, helpful, efficient, patient, professional, concerned, knowledgeable); over 80% at least rated the worker favorably for each attribute (Fryer, et al., 1990). Almost three-quarters of respondents rated the services they received as excellent or good, and over half believed that their family lives were better due to the workers' efforts.

However a little more than one-fifth of families served did believe their worker had made inaccurate judgments about parenting problems; one-fifth did not think their worker was thorough in their investigation; and one-firth did not feel the worker had answered their questions to their satisfaction (Fryer, et al., 1990). This one-fifth seems to represent a dissatisfied minority that merits future study.

Washington DSHS/DCFS has recently taken the commendable action of conducting a survey to ask clients directly what they think.[6] The results are quite instructive.

Clients' general perception of Washington CPS is positive but with a serious negative component. A strong majority (58%) report overall satisfaction with their contact, but the 42 percent negative is a serious measure of dissatisfaction. In political terms, that high a negativity rating would pose a crippling obstacle for a candidate. CPS staff communication presents a mixed picture Clients had highly positive responses to staff explaining CPS concerns clearly, having a good understanding of how their family felt and the services they desired. While most clients (69%) say they were treated with respect, the 29% who were not form a sizable dissatisfied minority. There was a significant perception of a lack of keeping clients informed

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[6] Carol Crawford, MSW and Diana English, PhD, "Community Agency, Referent and Client Feedback of DCFS Performance." WA DSHS/DCFS Surveys Seattle, August 1995.

(50%), and 47% say their calls were not returned promptly, within 24 hours. This finding is parallel to that reported by referring colleagues: well meaning staff who either due to agency culture or overwork are not willing or able to keep the people they are working with informed about what they are doing.

Clients reported significant disagreement about their family plan, with more than a third disagreeing. Of course, with an agency that must often remove children from parents after charging them with neglect or abuse, such disagreement should be expected. A third reported no significant sense of having an active role in preparing the plan for their family. Again, we cannot tell whether this reflects poor communication or simply the dynamics of disagreeing with the actions of an enforcement agency.

Client responses about cultural sensitivity paint an interesting picture. On the one hand, 79 % said ethnic/cultural background of the CPS worker did not matter to them. On the other hand, 35 % said the services offered or received were not sensitive to their culture or religion. It appears that work must be done on communicating cultural sensitivity, but that it is not a simple matter of matching caseworkers to clients by ethnicity. This matter should be probed more deeply.

Focus Group Summary

Another important vehicle for eliciting a range of perspectives in this pilot phase was a focus group held on August 28, 1995. We decided we would learn more during this session if we invited citizens who had more than a passing interest in children's issues. At the same time, we wanted to exclude child welfare professionals, who would be well represented at the other meetings. We therefore asked organizations widely known for their work with children[7] to loan us their mailing lists, excluding only child care professionals. We then selected women and men of various ages and ethnic backgrounds, and invited from each list until we had 10 who were willing to come to the University of Washington for three evening hours to talk about "issues concerning children". David Messerschmidt led the focus group, which was clearly engaging for the participants, and most instructive for us.[8]

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[7] The Children's Alliance, CASA/GALs

[8] It is important to remember the special character of the only focus group we ran during this pilot, and to be careful about any generalizations. Both disinterested citizens and persons from other parts of the state where local conditions are quite different, for example, might provide very different responses. But later we comment on the similarity of these data and the findings from other recent focus groups.

Since this group met at the tail end of widespread public discussion of the Lauria Grace tragedy,[9] we thought it important to bring up "Grace" ourselves without allowing this or any particular case to dominate the discussion. Despite our fears about dwelling on "Grace", we found the participants to be remarkably able, even anxious, to provide balanced, thoughtful comments about current and long-term care-taking issues. We had decided to show two quite different excerpts from television coverage of child care near the end of the evening, and one of these discussed Laurie Grace. Even with this prod, the participants were quickly able to move from the specific details to a general discussion of media attention.

It is impossible to capture all the issues which the focus group wrestled with in the available space, so we have chosen to incorporate representative comments summarized around major themes which reflect the content of our proposal:

- **The participants have an acute sense of complexity of child welfare in late 20th Century U.S.**

In the introductory discussion, there were numerous comments about how difficult it is to care for children effectively "these days," with particular reference to single parent families, homes where both parents work full time, wide-spread drug use, and the "general disintegration of the family in an insecure age" . All of these were cited as prominent and general features weighing down contemporary families.

Participants also thought that some neighborhoods and communities are especially hard hit. One women estimated that in the Central Area of Seattle, as many as 25% of this children are raised by someone other than their own parents, sometimes with subsidies from the state, and often without.

- **The participants revealed considerable understanding of and compassion for the dilemmas facing the child welfare professionals.**

The conditions under which agencies have to work, the budget crises they routinely face, misrepresentations in the media, and the burden of large and difficult case loads were clear to these people. As one said:

> "The (family) situations are often awful, and there's a desperate need to places kids somewhere. The department has to deal with what they have, with little resources and sometimes no choices."[10]

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[9] This refers to complex situation where a child was returned to her mother only to be killed by the mother, and where child care workers have accused of sloppy work and insufficient attention to warning signs.

[10] It was common for the facilitator to be asking about child care agencies generally, and for the responses to focus on the Department of Children and Family Services. This tendency may be exaggerated by the publicity about the department during the previous months.

Said another,

> "There's nothing worse that seeing a kid moved from place to place with their life represented by the contents of a plastic bag."

There was agreement that responsible efforts are made to deal with difficult situations. For example, they thought that it was appropriate for agencies to seek out relatives as guardians for children who needed to be removed from their own homes.

- **At the same time, the participants are hardly forgiving of what they regard as irresponsible behavior by child welfare professionals:**

No matter how complex the situations they confront, child welfare agencies are not excused by these citizens from engaging in finely-tuned case-specific efforts on behalf of children who come to their attention.

Pursuing the comment above, one noted that while it's good to seek out relatives, ultimately it is the "quality" of any substitute care that is important. The assumption is that "a relative will take good care of a child and from my experience, this is untrue."

Foster homes are also thought to be a mixed bag. One person said that "from the details of cases they know personally, you have to wonder about the quality of some foster parents." Another added that

> "The quality of foster care is hardly uniform, and may not be safer (for a child)..." One attendee with experience as a volunteer court advocate said that resources are scarce and home situations sometimes scary, but when you're short of good foster homes, "At 5 PM Friday, it's sometimes like playing Russian Roulette"
>
> More generally, another thought that "the whole system is based on short-term expediency, not long-term adjustment."

The Department of Children and Family Services is seen as sometimes "ripping a child from the only security he knows". And one worried that too many foster parents are there to "have their own needs met", with another estimating that 50% of foster parents are Christians trying to convert the children.

- **The media was generally agreed to provide a highly distorted representation of the context and outcomes of professional intervention into troubled families.**

The media was strongly criticized for its coverage of child welfare even before we asked any media-specific questions, and then in great detail once we raised the subject, "The electronic media is partially guilty of seeing the failures (of the system) rather than the successes." Many

agreed vigorously when one said we know "their bias: what will sell papers". "We tend to hear about what's going wrong. This taints our perception, and we get jaded."

But they agreed when another added that "As a society we lap it up - the exposes, our interest in the gory"

The television excerpts provided grist for a complex and sustained discussion. In response to our "trapped in the system" video excerpt, participants thought the department was made to seem "fatally incompetent," with the family only victimized. As one said:

> "You're led from what they say to think that things can't possibly have been that bad at home for (the child)" (as they are once the department intervened.)

Participants also recognized that confidentiality issues inhibited the DCFS from revealing what their perspective was about the family, and this in a context where the family will never say "I really need help" and will instead say "the system's wrong". "CPS can't call up and say 'let us tell you what's really happening (with this family)'. And the parents always call".

Views are led with this one-sided presentation to wonder, "How bad do parents have to be for this CPS treatment to be better?"

They also understood without prompting that the rebound from these stories can have a devastating impact of the distribution of resources. As one woman said, when one child dies, administrators faced with this media coverage will only "pull in the wagons tighter. Case work time is finite, so they take time from other cases, and spend less time with clients".

- **Participants were able to suggest a wide range of thoughtful strategies for improving the child welfare system:**

Some of the suggestions were general, and dealt with matters external to child welfare agencies:

> "We need to start training people to be parents at a younger age"
> "They're going to be parents, and need to learn "What does good parenting mean?"

Others focused on what could be done to change the general tenor of the discussion about child care, and the context within which the work was done:

> "What about highlighting when (child welfare professionals) do a good job - the equivalent of a Golden Apple for a job well done, some documentaries which show what workers go through to do their job, not just with a focus on the negative.
>
> How about a "series on the saints" in child care?.

Someone suggest that the media borrow the tone of the COPS series about what police really do and start "a CPS equivalent which shows what CPS and intake workers really do."

More features like "Wednesday's Child" were called for, and one person suggested that "We need in-depth stories on kids in the system, not just that they die." "And it's not just the public that gets the wrong idea: Olympia (meaning the legislature) really forgets quickly."

Their analyses were quite sophisticated, and recognized that even tragedies have value to the child care system. For example, in a discussion of Eli Creekmore case, where the investigation of the death of a Native American child in Washington led to many investigations and an important PBS documentary, one person noted that the case has been very effective for fundraising because it "personalizes the case". One agency in particular was described as having used that case very adroitly in their only publicity.

They also agreed that it was very important for citizens to feel that you could do something, and that we need to inform people about the ways they can make a difference:[11]

> "I would feel very depressed if I didn't have a way to do something"
> "sometimes with the legislative process, sometimes with service themselves".

A vigorous discussion ensued when one person said that it was important that so much personal responsibility was being "given away to agencies," and that people have to think about "what's my responsibility" and "move it more toward our work, where you can "Light up the corner where you live"

The larger context of insufficient child care was also clearly expressed.

> "None of this will improve if we don't do something about the employment situation, and provide subsidized child care".

Though these were child-care savvy people in Washington, their responses on core issues - - the difficulty of the situations facing both children and child care agencies these days -- were remarkably similar to the responses elicited in focus groups conducted for the Public Children Services Association of Ohio in March, 1995.[12]

The Ohio effort included 8 focus groups chosen to be representative of citizens in 8 counties throughout Ohio. Their 2-hour sessions covered a wider range of subjects in less detail than ours. Where our purposes overlapped, so do the responses. For example, all of their eight groups are concerned that "more families are falling apart today than in the past" for reasons like those cited by our participants. More of their respondents than ours seemed to express general reservations

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[11] But we need to remember that these are people who were drawn from lists of child-relevant organizations, and who may be unrepresentative in their interest in their own involvement in these issues.

[12] Decision Research Corporation, Cleveland, Ohio. "Phase One Focus Group Research", May, 1995 report.

about government activity ("Are we ever getting our money's worth from the government?"), they also felt that family preservation is a goal that can't always be achieved. As their focus group summary states:

- **If any one phrase could sum up the eight groups' comments about family preservation, it would be "it depends".**

Once again ambivalence surface as group members also agreed that While it's harmful to children to be removed from home, it might be more harmful to leave the children in an abusive situation.

The focus group reporter linked major themes in her commentary by noting that

> **"No one in any of the groups pointed to the apparent contradiction expressed by so many members who both disliked the idea of government intervention, yet criticized case workers for not continuing to intervene."**

Our Washington respondents are more pre-disposed to government action than those in Ohio, but in both cases participants revealed a level of sensitivity to the real-world of child-care intervention which suggests that they could be allies in a concerted effort if it were sustained and well understood.

Media vs. Public Opinion

These rough data suggest that the California and Washington media coverage may not reflect public values; rather, they may be responding to a vocal minority concerned with parents rights or pandering to what they believe is a public fascination with child sexual abuse. They also suggest that **there is a favorable underpinning of public opinion for a communication effort aimed at protecting children.** However, it will be important to develop more detailed information which:

- differentiates among age, gender and ethnic groups
- tracks opinions consistently over time
- distinguished attitudes about child neglect, physical and sexual abuse
- directly confronts tradeoffs among child protection and parent rights.

Another significant aspect of media coverage we observed is **a tendency to focus on public agencies and whether they are adequately protecting children, as opposed to focusing on either the perpetrator or the lack of family and community supports**. The focus on holding public agencies accountable may seem reasonable, since state or county Child Protective Services have the ultimate legal responsibility for protecting children known to be at risk. The news reporters participating in our sessions were adamant about their duty to delve into public agencies and hold them accountable for the deaths of children. The participants decided that the impact of focusing on public agencies, and not on the entire public-private system has a mixture of positive and negative impacts:

Participants, including public agency staff, believe that media attention to tragic mistakes forces agencies to accept responsibility, examine their practices and make necessary changes. Thus, skillful managers can use the pressure of media criticism to impel reforms in otherwise resistant bureaucratic structures.

Media attention to agency problems also gives an opportunity to demonstrate when caseloads are too high for caseworkers to do an effective job protecting children and dealing fairly with families' individual needs. This is born out by surveys indicating that the public perceives high caseload as a problem in both Washington and California. However, there is frustration that this public perception has not been translated into legislative relief, even though numerous commissions have pointed out that Washington caseloads far exceed national standards and recommended increased funding.

The current situation in Washington State provides an interesting case example. Following several tragic occurrences, independent review commissions recommended changes in internal procedures, improved accountability structures and funding to reduce caseloads. The Governor has responded to those reports, making many changes by executive discretion and recommending increased investment in caseworkers. To date, most of the discussion in the legislature and therefore most media coverage, has been on breaking up the Dept. of Social and Health services to improve accountability, with little discussion of what resources are required for caseworkers and supervisors to do a good job of protecting children and meeting the needs of families. A more effective public communication effort could have affected this debate. However, it would be more effective if the communication originated outside the department, since departmental requests for more staff funding are seen as self-serving and an excuse for not doing there job well with current funds. We will talk more about the relationship of state departments to private agencies in the next section.

The lack of historical perspective is a major concern to professionals. It was pointed out that press and legislators caught up in the heat of a tragedy tend to ignore recent positive changes in legislation or management which are addressing the problem, but have not fully converted the system. This is compounded by failing to look at the cumulative failure of the legislature to respond to recommendations of reduced caseloads. However, each commission report tends to be treated by executive, legislature and media as a singular event, and we see little effort to package the reports and present the cumulated recommendations to hold the legislature accountable for its lack of response. This is another example of how an effective communications strategy could help recast the policy debate.

The media focus on government agencies tends to set up a no-win value conflict by focusing on "who is to blame for this case," rather than on "why isn't the system working right for kids?" Thus, if the case is the tragic death of a child, then the agency is blamed for not intervening decisively and removing children from dangerous parents. If the case is a child removed from parents who then gets shunted among multiple foster homes and not succeeding in life, then the agency is blamed for breaking up families, as well as failing kids. In both cases, the media focus is on blaming the agency, rather than the perpetrator. In our discussions with CPS

supervisors, we were struck by the fact that the agency seems to reinforce this problem by seeing itself as the single bastion for defending children, and not communicating that CPS only gets involved when others have failed -- parents, neighbors, community. Social workers seem to expect to be overworked, underpaid and unappreciated, and take this on as part of their professional ethos (see discussion of burnout later in paper).

Confidentiality is perceived as a major issue by many CPS staff, who believe that they are prohibited from saying what they need to say about the particulars of a case to defend their action. In addition to confidentiality law, many professionals believe that they should not hurt the family or further imperil children by disclosing embarrassing information to the press. However, some media savvy professionals indicated that they can say more than many people think, by discussing hypothetical cases which share common characteristics, and thus helping the public understand the complex situations of abusing or neglecting families. This is clearly an area where effective communications training and development of simple guidelines could help professionals find effective ways to communicate why they are taking certain actions without breaking confidentiality laws or imperiling children. However, confidentiality is often seen as smokescreen by media, who believe the public has a right to know anything involving public intervention with a family or failure to protect a child.

Lacking in the equation are the private, non-profit helping agencies in the community. On the one hand, most of these agencies work with DSHS on a regular basis. The Washington survey of referents[13] suggests that most of these agencies think that DSHS is open and candid in its dealings with them, that CPS staff have a positive, helpful attitude and treat them with courtesy. Most agree with CPS decisions to remove children from homes (90 percent for cases where removal occurred). However, accessibility of agency and staff is a concern. They report that input to DCFS is heard and understood; but only 25% say DCFS incorporates their plans and ideas. Lack of feedback a major concern, particularly in not contacting them about mutual clients. The overall picture is of an agency going it alone, trying to pick up all the pieces, and too burdened with workload to consult with colleagues in private agencies who could share the burden. This plays out in the communication realm as a sense by the private agencies that they have no obligation to speak up when the media is heaping blame of the public agency. There is little sense of community obligation or partnership, nor of a durable alliance of professionals working together to protect children. Rather, private experts tend to join in talking about the failures and lack of responsiveness of the public agency.

The lack of a credible private clearninghouse to provide the press with context and access to a range of public and private voices is felt sorely in times of crisis. Agencies under threat find it difficult to share information with "outsiders," who are then in no position to defend their decisions or actions. It tends to become a we/they conflict between public agency and press, with other concerned professionals watching from the sidelines. Since the common overriding

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Carol Crawford, MSW and Diana English, PhD, Community Agency, Referent and Client Feedback of DCFS Performance." WA DSHS/DCFS Surveys. Seattle, August 1995.

concern is for the welfare of children, when private experts are asked to comment, they tend to focus on what more could be done to protect children. This is positive for overall public understanding, but does not tend to help the debate about investing public resources. In the DCFS surveys, a majority of both referents and clients said referred families did not receive the services they needed to change the conditions endangering children. Yet this does not get brought into the debate when the media focus on who was to blame for removing or not removing a child from the home.

Another critical reference point is whether the media portrait of child protection matches the system as perceived by the clients who are served by it. It is important to remember that in 1994, the rate of referrals to CPS in Washington state equals one in five children below the age of six. When one thinks of how that one in five figure cumulates over time, even discounting for repeat referrals, a large proportion of the public has had direct contact with CPS. An even larger proportion has a friend or family member who has had direct contact. The nature of that experience and how CPS staff communicate with clients is thus a major determinant of public opinion. For these people, media portrayals will serve to confirm or deny their own experience.

As discussed above, the Iowa and Washington State Surveys revealed an overall positive response to CPS workers by their clients, but with a substantial negative component. It is hard to find the positive in the media coverage. While it is important for media to hold people accountable when they perform damaging actions, it is responsible journalism to give a context and convey whether these are indeed rare occurrences, or whether they represent the normal mode of operation at the agency. When no context is given, and negative reports appear on a regular basis, the impression given is a pattern of poor performance.

Impact of Sensationalized Media Coverage on Policy and Practice

As mentioned above, our analysis showed that the media tend to sensationalize the maltreatment of children, and focus particularly on sexual abuse. We probed child protection experts about the impact of sensationalized coverage.

On the positive side, they believe that sensational coverage and the ensuring public alarm helps overcome denial of the high rates of abuse observed by professionals. This is seen as offering the potential to mobilize the community to take actions to prevent abuse and invest more public resources in the issue.

However, there are many serious negative impacts.

Since reporting of sensational cases tends to focus on blaming public agencies for failure to protect, rather than blaming the perpetrator, it adds to public skepticism about those agencies' ability to protect children or deal fairly with parents. This undercuts the desire to invest more in protections.

The pressures generated by media investigations tend to unbalance agency resources, increasing funds allocated to investigating abuse, and leaving less to prevent either abuse or neglect. The focus on structural issues in public agency, such as the focus on restructuring Washington DSHS, leads policy makers to ignore needs at the family, caseworker level. The clients, review commissions and child protection experts cite needs for training of workers, improving coordination at the caseworker level and giving clients needed services; these get ignored when the focus is on blaming agency heads. There are six levels of supervision between a CPS caseworker and the Secretary of DSHS. Restructuring is likely to move the secretary and assistant secretary, and have little impact on the caseworkers and line supervisors who have the most impact on most decisions[14].

The message that comes down from a legislature inflamed by the media is pressure to avoid repeat mistakes. The watchword is not "service to clients," but "accountability." This often leads to excessive supervision and limits the time caseworkers can spend with families. Another study in Washington found that 74% of caseworker time is spent other than with clients.[15] This sense of public blame demoralizes child protection workers, reinforcing the "martyr complex" we mentioned above. It is a classic case of micro management and dominance of focus on a limited number of failures leading to risk averse behavior and low staff morale.

It is important to remember the numbers: 83,500 cases referred; 55,000 accepted; 15 child deaths. However, given the tragedy of any one child's death, communicating these relative numbers is difficult. The worst time to do it is at the time of the tragedy. Many of our professional participants believe that holding themselves accountable for a zero-tolerance of death standard is unrealistic and misleads the public about the reality of the families they are dealing with. It seems to us that there is a major problem with deciding and communicating who should be accountable for avoiding child deaths; public agencies or the public. If it were effectively communicated that CPS was only coming in when others had failed, and that an appropriate response was to invest resources in avoiding families getting to the stage where a serious risk of death occurs, the policy debate could be quite different. However, this debate would have to be built on a continuing basis, providing a favorable background of public understanding when random tragedies occur.

Current Opportunities for Change

As we examine our analysis of media, public opinion and trends in child protection, we see that this is an opportune time to mobilize public opinion in a way which will improve the well-being of children.

First, public opinion appears more sophisticated than media and legislatures. It gives clear primacy to protecting children, but wants to address some of the complexities. And it wants assurance that there is a clear distinction between physical abuse and appropriate discipline, which

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[14] cite Lipsky and Weatherly, "Street Level Bureaucrats" article

[15] DSHS/DCFS, analysis provided to Governor's Task Force on Child Protection, 1995.

may include corporal punishment. Further assurance is required that competent professionals are looking fairly at all facts in each case. In both our focus group and the focus groups held in Ohio, respondents wanted to have methods for case by case determination of whether it was more important to preserve families or remove children for their own protection. When we reported the public opinion polls on behaviors which more than 60 percent of the American public considers abusive, our expert participants were struck by the fact that the public categorizes as abuse behaviors far less extreme than are currently required for a determination of abuse in any state. Therefore a public information effort built around the need to protect children by dealing with the complex conditions of families should be well received by a substantial majority of the public.

Next, the Governor and Washington DSHS are willing to undertake substantial changes in their operations and relationships with external communities. Recent examples include conducting customer satisfaction surveys, developing "community decision teams" to assist DCFS in difficult cases, an executive order separating licensing from investigations in foster care, proposed creation of an Ombudsman to investigate difficult cases and provide a short-circuit for problems which seem to get stuck in the bureaucracy, creation of the Family Policy Council and local Community Network planning process to restructure services around measurable outcomes.

Finally, changes in federal funding to block grants or other systems are likely to give states more flexibility and thus provide an opportunity for new approaches, such as shifting funds into prevention and family support, rather than investigation. Regardless of the outcome of the current federal budget impasse, there is likely to be a 1-3 year window in which state policy-makers will be considering how to use new authority. For example, counties would get more flexibility over use of funds under California's enabling legislation which anticipates the new block grants.

Getting the Story Right

Given this favorable climate, we believe there are a range of actions which can produce better communication and public understanding and support for effective child protection.

- **There is a clear need and opportunity for "cross-training" between reporters/editors and child protection experts; the desire to participate in such efforts was expressed to us by both child protection and media professionals.**

It became clear in our meetings and conversations, that for the most part, experts and media folks have little idea about how the other operates on a day to day basis, or of the basic precepts and knowledge underlying the other's work. However, each is curious about the other and would like to be well-informed. Our participants eagerly asked us to develop forums or other methods of cross-training and exchange.

This kind of training would do more than just generate a few good stories about foster care and child protection. It would provide media folks a deeper understanding of what is really going on with children and families, so that when they reported on a tragic case, they would understand the kind of challenges faced by professionals, be they public or private sector folks. In particular, it would give them a clear picture of the size and shape of the problem, so that they would know whether they are responding to a vocal minority or a broad concern in the system.

It would teach child protection experts to think in communication terms, not just media terms. That is, they would come to understand how communication occurs constantly and how to use it to good effect. They would learn how to develop clear, consistent messages rather than verbiage loaded with jargon and bureaucratic detail, how to provide concise, reliable data and how to weave facts into a coherent story. Such communications skills would assist in relations not just with media, but with communities, legislators, business people and civic leaders.

The news media are critically important for directly affecting public policy actions. However, as we laid out in the beginning of this paper, there are a wide range of policy and cultural beliefs and behaviors ultimately affecting public policy for child protection. We believe that to have long-lasting, structural impact on the child protection system, we must design a strategy which will reach beyond the news media to other influences on these beliefs and behaviors.

Examples Of Successful Campaigns

There are several available books summarizing key elements of effective mass communication for health or social purposes. One of the best is a recent publication by Andreasan.[16] Describing the successful, long running and carefully evaluated National High Blood Pressure Education Program, Andreasan provides a summary of the key factors which made it work. These provide an excellent checklist for what he calls "social marketing," which we think applies well in the case of child protection, and have taken into account in designing our proposed approach.

- "*It focuses on behavior*...
- *It works through intermediaries*. It recognizes that the problem is too large for one organization to tackle and that many other health care institutions have an important state ...coordinates ...through forty-one partner organizations.
- *It insists on a unified communication approach*. ... a communications consultant develops carefully articulated communications objectives and strategies, defines target audiences, and establishes roles for intermediary groups. All messages are designed to reinforce one another.
- *It starts by understanding the customers* ... and their perceptions.
- *It adapts to changes in the audience* ... as it evolves through various stages of the behavior change process.
- *It avoids mass marketing* .. differentiated strategies for different market segments.
- *Its message strategies have focused on consequences*, both positive and negative ...
- *Its message strategies have also focused on social influence*.
- *It emphasized the Place component of the mix*."

The primary concept of focusing on behavior is critical for making the translation between public health campaigns and a policy-oriented campaign. All too often, communications efforts focus too much on evoking an emotional response, or conveying specific information, without a clear concept of what behaviors they wish to produce in those receiving their message. That is a critical difference between public education and commercial advertising, which has a clear behavior in mind - buy this product, now.

To prepare this proposal, we have reviewed several major successful public communication efforts, and believe that if their experiences are taken carefully into account, there

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[16] Alan R. Andreasan, Marketing Social Change: Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development and the Environment. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass, 1995. page 20.

is good reason to believe that a communication strategy can be successful in changing beliefs, opinions and behaviors affecting child protection policy.

The National High Blood Pressure Education Program (NHBPEP) is the longest ongoing effort to change behavior using social marketing techniques. It has been quite a successful program. When the program began in 1972, less than a third of the public knew of the link between high blood pressure and stroke, and less than a quarter knew about the link with heart disease. By 1985, 91% were aware of the link to heart disease, and more than three-quarters were aware of the link to stroke (Andreasen, pp. 18-21; Glanz, et al., pp. 362-365).

More importantly, there were a number of significant behavioral changes that came about as a result of NHBPEP, including 94% of the population knowing the status of their blood pressure, and about one-half of hypertensives taking steps to address their blood pressure problem. By 1991, the percentage of hypertensives taking such steps rose to 73%. The majority of hypertensives indicated that they had made key diet changes and started exercising. In a later phase, the program also incorporated an emphasis on the "maintenance phase" of changing behaviors, and moved to target especially high-risk populations (Andreasen, pp.18-21; Glanz, et al., pp. 362-365).

The NHBPEP is a good example of an effective social marketing program. First of all, the campaign focused on effecting behavioral change in hypertensives, rather than relying only on the indirect influence of public education. Secondly, the NHBPEP recognized the magnitude of the high blood pressure problem, and recruiting forty-one partner organizations from the health care sector. Thirdly, the program adopted a unified communication approach that started by understanding the audience, then adapted to changes in customers, and avoided mass marketing. The message strategies employed by the NHBPEP incorporated both information about consequences and focused on social influence. Finally the program emphasized a "place" component, by making blood pressure tests available in shopping mall an in homes, thus eliminating one of the biggest barriers to behavioral change (Andreasen, pp. 18-21; Glanz, et al., pp. 362-365).

The Stanford Five-City Project Smoker's Challenge (FCP) is another example of a successful social marketing program. Part of the FCP program targeted male smokers who were moderately motivated to quit, or in the so-called "contemplation stage" of quitting. Using many of the same social marketing techniques, the program established three behavioral objectives: recruit a large number of participants from the community, achieve a 20 percent permanent quit rate, and provide maintenance skills for quitters. At the end of the campaign, these goals had been achieved, with enrollment of 501 smokers in the challenge, 45% of whom had quit for some time, and 22% who quit permanently. After one year of maintenance, 15% remained nonsmokers. After re-evaluating and modifying the program, a 30% quit rate was achieved in the second implementation (Andreasen, pp. 26-28).

More examples of effective social marketing are the various programs put into effect by HealthCom, or the Health Communications for Child Survival, sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development. For example, HealthCom carried out the PREMI project in Ecuador,

focusing on the promotion of child immunization and oral rehydration therapy (for child diarrhea). This program brought the immunization rate up from 22% to 66% after 18 months. At the end of the same time period, virtually all mothers had been made aware of the oral rehydration therapy, three-quarters of mothers knew how to properly prepare it, 60% had at least tried it, and one-fifth now used it, as compared to just 5% at the start (Andreasen, pp. 22-26; Glanz et al, pp. 359-362).

Examples of successful child abuse prevention efforts are not as straight-forward, but are nonetheless encouraging. Since the "rediscovery" of child abuse in the 1960's, there have been many changes in legislation and the child welfare system, national education campaigns, the establishment of many private agencies committed to the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. Many argue that these efforts have resulted in a major reduction in child abuse and neglect (See Donnelly, 1991, for a summary and analysis of child abuse prevention efforts of the 1980's).

Straus and Gelles, comparing the results of their 1975 national family violence survey to the 1985 survey, found that with the exception of the most severe (and rare) forms of child abuse, there was an overall 47% decrease in the reported rate of child physical abuse (Straus & Gelles, 1986). Although there were some methodological differences between the two surveys (e.g., in-person vs. telephone interviews), these differences should have led to higher, not lower, reports of child abuse. Straus and Gelles also point to social changes that may have contributed to this decrease, such as changes in family structure and economic conditions, but argue that the decrease was due in part to the education, prevention, treatment, and deterrent programs put into effect during that ten-year period. The higher rate of child abuse reports to child protective services also bolsters this argument, demonstrating that Americans are not only changing their own abusive behaviors, but are more willing to intervene in abusive situations (Straus & Gelles, 1986).

Daro's comparison of the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse's 1995 national survey to previous NCPCA surveys, demonstrates the same trends. The NCPCA found that 17% fewer parents in 1995 reported using physical punishment than had reported in 1988, consistent with the gradual decline seen over the past 9 years of the survey (Daro, 1995). The use of alternative punishment behaviors, such as time-outs, has correspondingly increased over the years, with 60% of parents in 1995 reporting confining children to their rooms, and 80% using denial of privileges (Daro, 1995).

One of the NCPCA's pet projects has been the promotion of home visitation services for new parents. Although only 15% of families with children under one-year-old reported receiving such services in 1995, an overwhelming 80% found them useful, and 80% of parents in general supported government funding for home visitation services. Even two-thirds of those without children under 18 living at home supported government funding for home visitation to new parents (Daro, 1995). This is a powerful message that early prevention is both desired and perceived as effective by the large majority of Americans.

Specific examples of successful child abuse prevention campaigns are the "Don't shake the baby" campaigns, and recent efforts to address the role of chemical addiction in child abuse and neglect. Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is believed to cause 15% - 26% of all child homicides by battering, and as many as half of all parents have been show to be unaware of the dangers of shaking an infant (Showers, 1992). SBS may be becoming especially salient as the numbers of drug-exposed infants, whom are often medically-compromised and especially difficult to comfort, continues to increase.

Showers describes a one-year "Don't shake the baby" campaign in which 15,708 new parents received a "Don't shake the baby" packet that described reasons why babies cry, the dangers of shaking an infant, the alternative behavioral strategies available, and where to turn for help. About one-fifth of the parents returned a response postcard, 99% indicating that they had read the materials, and 91% recommending that other parents read them. More than three-quarters of respondents said they found the materials helpful, and about half said they were now less likely to shake their own baby. Race was an especially important factor, with fully 86% of nonwhite parents indicating the information was helpful, and 61% saying they were now less likely to shake their own baby. According to Showers, previous research supports the possibility that the 51% who did not report they were less likely to shake their own baby were probably already informed about the risk of SBS (Showers, 1992).

Interestingly, we also find that in a 1991 Texas statewide survey, the most dramatic change in public opinion concerned SBS: in 1978, only a little more than a quarter of respondents defined shaking a child as child abuse, whereas more than half defined it as child abuse in 1991 (Teske, 1992). It seems that the "Don't shake the baby" campaigns are working.

A recent campaign to encourage public action on behalf of maltreated children in chemically-addicted families has also proved very successful (Andrews, McLeese & Curran, 1995). Consistent with social marketing theory, this campaign focused on behavioral outcomes, arguing that public awareness of child abuse and neglect does not automatically translate into effective public action.

Recognizing the complex interrelationships between substance abuse and child abuse and neglect, as well as the vast scope of the problem, this campaign formed key partnerships with a public relations consulting firm, an interagency advisory committee, and a university-based evaluator. The target audience was carefully studied, both through a series of focus group and a statewide telephone survey. Message content was designed to be clear, communicate acceptability rather than blame, and was intended as a "call to action," with a focus on "easy action" that would build confidence in the listener's sense of efficacy. Lastly, the project provided a series of multi-site professional trainings to child welfare and addictions workers, as preparation for the expected increase in calls and referrals. Counselors and teachers were targeted as especially crucial for early intervention (Andrews, McLeese & Curran, 1995).

The message was delivered through a number of multimedia channels, including television (3-5 minute nightly news feature, for one week, a special 30-minute talk show, and 4 PSA, aired for 1 month), billboards, corporate newsletters and magazines, and health and human service

delivery sites. Four different regional partnerships were formed, consisting of a local TV station, the local child protection agency, and one or more corporate partners, e.g., a hospital, law firm, or insurance agency. The financial and logistical support garnered by these partnerships greatly augmented the original federal grant and added credibility to the message (Andrews, McLeese & Curran, 1995).

A mid-campaign survey found that 61% of respondents had heard the specific message, the vast majority through television. In fact, the television talk show special was so successful, it won the ratings time period in one region, and received higher ratings than the regular program ("Entertainment Tonight") had in the prior three days. The average total monthly calls to a 1-800 number grew by 61.9%, ten months after the campaign, with the number of substance abuse calls tripling, and the number of child abuse and neglect calls almost doubling (Andrews, McLeese & Curran). More comprehensive, long-term follow-up and evaluation is yet to be completed.

McAlister, et al. (1992) targeted the Mexican-American community for a smoking prevention and cessation campaign. This campaign had three components: a) recruitment of community members to model behavioral practices and self-efficacy by telling their stories on television, radio and in newspapers; b) recruitment of several hundred volunteers to network in their community, and draw attention to the media campaign; and c) a counseling referral system to address individual stressors related to smoking. Over a five-year period, smoking cessation rates of 17% (self-report) and 8% (verified) were observed in the community, as compared to 7% (self-report) and 1.5% (verified) in a comparison community.

Tones, et al. (1990) discusses the effectiveness of a National No Smoking Days in the UK, in 1984. Pre-publicity efforts resulted in 716 press reports that day, and 424 mentions on TV or radio. 79% of the population reported being aware of the campaign, and 70% reported approving of it. A survey of 2000 adults across the county found that 13% of smokers reported trying to give up smoking for the day. A follow-up study three months later found that 11% of smokers reported quitting on National No Smoking Day, and 9% reported being successful for two months. Another effort in the UK involved a 15-minute prime time documentary piece that also offered a free quit-smoking kit. With thirty minutes, four thousand people had called in for the kit, and 60,000 eventually wrote in for the kit.

A Washington, D.C. effort in 1980 broadcast six programs, over six consecutive weeks, on the hazards of smoking, to some 20,000 viewers. Self-help guides were offered in conjunction with every program, and those who requested the guides were sent three questionnaires. Of the 86.5% who returned the first questionnaire, 11.5% reported quitting; 64.2% returned the second questionnaire at three months, and 14.7% reported quitting; 71.4% returned the questionnaire after 6 months, and 17.6% reported quitting. Compared with the 50% cessation rate reported by face-to-face behavior modification clinics, a 17.6% cessation rate at 6 months was viewed as quite successful.

Follow-up of a 1990-1991 California anti-smoking media campaign (Popham et.al., 1993) revealed that 6.7% of 417 regular smokers who had quit during the media campaign

spontaneously named the campaign as an important factor in their decision to quit. When directly asked about the influence of the media campaign, 34.3% reported that the media campaign had been influential in their decision. The authors estimate that the media campaign played a part in 173,000 Californians' decision to stop smoking during that period.

Parameters of An Effective Communication Strategy

Based upon this problem definition analysis, we are able to recommend the broad parameters of an effective communication strategy for child protection. These parameters will have to be expanded into detailed plans in the next phase of the work.

Evolving strategy, track changing realities

The approach to communication which we have been discussing in this report sees communication as a continuous effort to educate and influence key audiences to affect public policy. This implies not planning a single "campaign;" rather, it requires an evolving strategy, which responds to changes in the public opinion and policy environments and seizes opportunities as they arise.

The basic building block is good public opinion research and message development. We need to conduct careful state level polls, built upon questions which have already been tested and verified in national surveys, to establish a baseline of public opinion about key policy and cultural issues. We would then feed this into a carefully facilitated set of sessions of our working group of child protection and communication experts to develop a set of clear, consistent policy and cultural messages which would be communicated to specified target audiences. This is the point where most public education campaigns stop their analysis. We do not believe that is appropriate given the complexity and newness of this effort. Rather, we would go through a sequence of pilot tests and analysis of message content and impact. The message themes developed by the working group would be tested in alternative forms with focus groups composed of members of selected audiences in different communities. The focus groups would consider the meaning of the messages, their emotional content and appeal, to see if they were being received by listeners in the intended fashion. After they were tested and refined to have the desired impact on focus group audiences, we would implement pilot campaigns in several selected communities for several months. We would then utilize surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews to evaluate the impact upon the knowledge and opinions of target audiences. Over time, we would expand the communities and audiences reached. Ultimately, a statewide effort will be built from the community pilots, utilizing communication tool kits and consistent messages developed by the project. We would work in close consultation with national organizations, both to learn from efforts they may be involved in, and to assure the eventual national applicability of our work.

II. Consistent messages, many spokespeople

A common mistake of public education campaigns is to limit their impact by having messages emanate from only a single source. It is far more effective to have many different spokespeople sounding similar words which support a consistent theme. This approach engenders added credibility to audiences, and maximizes the frequency with which the message can be delivered in a framework of limited resources. A good example is the success of the environmental movement in having many voices with different interests put their specific messages within the framework of a few common themes. Groups concerned with forests, birds, whales, clean air and water all make their specific points within similar broad themes such as protecting the planet for our children's future, or preserving the quality of life. When an audience hears any of those groups, there is a clear identification of "there goes an environmentalist." The difference in our case is that while there are many who oppose environmentalists as a group, there are few who oppose " child protectors." As noted above, public child protection agencies have strong "negatives" along with their majority "positive" public perceptions. A consistent set of messages can build on the positives, while avoiding reinforcing the negatives.

We recommend two activities toward getting this consistency. First, representatives of key groups putting out messages about child protection have already been recruited into our expert working group, and will participate in generating the broad themes. Our work with the group in the next phase will specifically address the issue of specific concerns fitting into broad themes. In addition, we will seek to have major organizations formally affiliate with our project, agreeing to cast their public information efforts within the agreed upon themes. In return, they will be given access to point sheets, communications consultation and other materials developed by the project.

While conducting public opinion research and facilitating the working group will be necessary to settle on definite themes, from the work we have done so far, we think that the following examples are a good starting point for effective themes which convey the concerns of child protection experts seeking to influence public policy:

- Primacy of protecting children
- Large scale need for prevention, family support
- Balance focus on neglect and abuse
- Individuality, complexity of family dynamics
- Community responsibility: limits of government

III. Full range of communication, not just media

Mass media -- news and advertising -- are prime tools in using public education to affect public policy. However, they are only part of an effective communication strategy. In the case of child protection, other communication channels are at least as important. As we mentioned above, a substantial proportion of the public has direct or indirect contact with Child Protective Services and community agencies, so their mindset is largely determined close to home and is less likely to be filtered through media. The communications skills of agency staff are thus a critical part of the equation. Second, long term changes in public policy can be wrought most effectively if understanding and demand for the changes comes up to legislators from concerned citizens and community leaders. We therefore recommend that a major focus be on enhancing the knowledge and opinions of local civic and business leaders. Since there is not likely to be a multi-million dollar advertising budget available, we recommend the following strategies:

1. Maximize the frequency of message delivery by creative opportunism in piggybacking related stories, stage newsworthy events, produce a limited number of PSAs, seek pro-bono ads.

2. "Cooperative media" - have multiple opinion leaders telling the story by arranging guest pieces in business and association newsletters, speakers for civic organizations.

3. Create and maintain tools such as fact sheet with accurate, timely statistics, sources and expert contacts; see that these toolkits are widely distributed and receive feedback from likely users.

4. Build a long-term base of understanding by developing communications efforts with public schools.

5. Maintain ongoing media relations; help agencies (public and private) plan for damage control when tragedies occur; have a clearinghouse ready to actively counter "bad" information by putting out good facts, context pieces and recommending experts for interviews.

6. Public agencies should conduct training to improve communication skills of all workers.

III. Critical Resources

The basic resources for an effective public communication effort are not currently available to the child protection community. We recommend that private foundations invest in developing these tools, which can be tested, refined and distributed to many different groups interested in protecting children. The most important resources are:

1. Consistent public opinion data - polls, focus groups -- for message development, assessment of impact, feedback and refinement

2. Clearinghouse of spokespeople with consistent message and data

3. Toolkits, plus training for agencies, community leaders, reporters and editors.

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Proposed UW/HSPC Project:
Developing A Communication Strategy For Protecting Children

Summary

- The time is ripe to conduct a communication strategy to change Public Opinion and Child Protection policy, if it includes careful development of message content and utilizes a broad communications strategy that is targeted to multiple audiences and clearly specified policy actions.

- Communication should occur through multiple channels: mass media (news, editorial, entertainment), speeches and presentations at schools and civic organizations, articles placed in newsletters and trade journals; direct interaction of child protection agency staff with community members.

- The message development effort should bring together representatives of key players from public and private agencies, with media and other communication experts to specify message content and desired behavior changes, to forge durable alliances and provide multiple voices for mutually reinforcing message delivery.

- Message content should focus primrily on protecting children, with prevention of child abuse and neglect as the ultimate objective. The roles of public and private agencies and how they could better protect children should be clarified. Quality foster care is an important component of protection.

- The effort should balance "policy messages" directed at specific actions with "cultural messages," affecting the environment of beliefs and attitudes in which policy-makers address these issues. There must be a "customer orientation" of determining the dimension and dynamics underlying currently held beliefs in order to develop messages which will produce desired changes in behavior.

- The effort should be phased over several years, with careful pilot testing and evaluation of impact in several diverse communities for the first two years. All participants should adopt a "learning orientation," with careful field research, testing and evaluation taking primacy over professional biases or preconceptions.

The project should be conducted by a partnership which combines an organization with the research skills necessary to analyze public opinion and evaluate the impact of the campaign with an organization which has the independence and depth of community networks to implement the campaign.

1. Objective

Improve state and community public policy for child protection by conveying carefully developed message content to selected target audiences. Messages will be designed not just to convey information or emotion, but to elicit changes in policy-relevant behavior. Our message development research will be geared to identify for each target audience segment the dynamics leading to their current behavior and identify reasons why it would be in their interest to change that behavior. Examples of desired behavior changes are listed below; the final choice of behaviors and appropriate message content will be determined by the message development component of the project.

Child Protection Community	• Create a cohesive working group and sense of partnership between public and private agencies.
	• Agree on "umbrella message" for all participants, which focuses on protecting children, not on organizations.
News Media	• Reportage of tragic deaths put in context of the broad scope of the problem and portrayed as rare
	• Shift emphasis from government agency responsibility for tragedies to family/community responsibility
	• Convey complexity of cases, avoid sensationalism
	• Editorial opinion reinforce these perspectives; hold policy-makers accountable for dealing with causes
State Policy Makers	• Shift balance of expenditure from investigation to prevention
	• Adopt policies favoring adoption and long-term placement for foster children.
	• Fund more caseworkers and support staff; link funding to prevalence rate of child abuse, neglect
Community Leaders	• Push for public/private partnerships among agencies; undertake community education, awareness efforts
	• Increase capacity of family support programs

Employers	•	Adopt family friendly practices, which reduce stress on families; encourage employees to give priority to family.
	•	Contribute volunteers, money to local family support efforts
General Public	•	Primacy of child protection, prevention of abuse, neglect as core values
	•	Understand family and community factors involved in child abuse and neglect
	•	Get personally involved in local family support activities

2. Message Development

a. Public Opinion Research and Evaluation:

1. **Objectives:**
   - determine dimensions and dynamics of current policy and cultural beliefs held by general public and key opinion leaders and policy makers
   - determine public's sources of information, who they hold responsbile for protecting children, and their willingness to invest resources for protection
   - specify policy and cultural messages aimed at key audiences to influence beliefs and policy actions

2. **Methods:**
   - Differentiate target audiences; test for ethnicity, value or other distinguishing characteristics as determinants of difference.
   - Structured focus groups [build on efforts in other states]
   - State/Community Polls [build on national polls]
   - Message content analysis; where are people getting messages and what is their content - include media content analysis and other surveys
   - Review local media content in pilot communities

3. Research and evaluation will be conducted periodically throughout the project:

- Initially to develop baseline measures of community knowledge and opinion as well as of the policy behaviors we intend to affect.
- Analysis of baseline measures will aid in message development and testing
- At specified points to measure the impact of communication strategies.
- We will employ a multiple-method form of evaluation, bringing together analyses of budgets, staffing and other observable behavior with public opinion information derived from surveys, repeated panels of policy-makers, parents, community leaders and media representatives.

b. Message Consistency and Mutual Reinforcement. HSPC will:

1. Facilitate working group of child protection experts - - confront differences, work out agreements for joint effort, clearinghouse and affiliation agreements.
2. Conduct general communication training for child protection experts: message-driven communications, understanding and working with media, applying developed messages.
3. Specify actions desired as result of change in public opinion: public policy, community engagement, news coverage, public opinion and activity.
4. Conduct cross-training of experts and media representatives.
5. Feed in findings from public opinion research.
6. Pilot alternative messages with diverse focus groups.

3. Message Delivery

We want to deliver both policy messages and cultural messages using multiple communication channels.

It is desirable to have a separation between the research and evaluation activities, and the daily operation of delivering messages. **We will therefore seek an operating partner(s) with the organizational capacity to deliver messages by this broad range of channels in target communities: e.g., Children's Home Society; Casey Family Program.**

a. Prime partnership(s)

UW/HSPC and a private, non-profit agency will be the prime partners, and contribute equal numbers of members to the project steering committee, which shall control the project budget and make decisions on message content and delivery. UW/HSPC will be designated the "research, development and evaluation partner;" the non-profit agency will be designated the "operating partner." UW/HSPC will be the fiscal agent for this grants; other related grants for communication activities may be sought in which the operating partner may be fiscal agent.

b. We will seek other "affiliated partners" among the organizations represented in the expert working group, and ask them to participate in message delivery by:

- agreeing to include core message themes in their public communication
- being available for press contacts
- providing and receiving clearinghouse material
- receiving media training.

The operating partner(s) will agree to control of message content by the project steering committee and will have lead responsibility for several major activities:

A. Operate a statewide clearinghouse, which will:

- provide consistent materials on facts and cases to participating affiliates
- get materials to mass media, both for self-generated opportunities and in response to stories generated elsewhere
- maintain a listing of experts ready and able to speak to press to give context and interpretation to media reports about child abuse or neglect, foster care and related child protection issues; this will include list of spokespeople in pilot communities.
- provide materials to interested human service, civic and child advocacy organizations statewide or in pilot communities

B. Mount a broad-based, multi-channel, public education campaign, utilizing a variety of media, based upon message development research and expert group discussions

The operating partner(s), in consultation with UW/HSPC, will select several diverse communities in which to pilot the messages.

- Local directors from the operating partner will participate in message development and delivery, including identifying key target audiences and arranging focus group participation
- The operating partner will ascertain current channels (formal and informal) of information dissemination and develop strategies for coordinated delivery of project messages to target audiences.
- The operating partner and its local divsions will identify the resources necessary to implement the project effectively in their community.

Policy messages will be directed to policy makers, civic leaders and the general public by means of:

- issue briefs and fact sheets
- news media
- briefings in Olympia and selected communities

Cultural messages will be aimed at the general public, and conveyed through:

- community opinion leaders - speakers at PTA, Rotary, Chamber etc
- guest pieces in organization newsletters
- emotional/informational spots conveyed through mass media: print/poster, radio, TV
- presentations at schools, including dramatizations and interactive discussions

Note: in the initial phases, we will focus on local efforts to influence cultural messages about child protection. If our evaluation shows that these messages are effective in influencing public opinion and policy, we will then seek resources and partners to influence national entertainment media which influence the cultural environment.

C. Coordinate communication efforts with other related campaigns.
We expect that several of the "affiliated partners" participating in the expert working group will be conducting related public education and information activities. In addition to seeking to have those campaigns incorporate key themes and message content developed by the working group, we will seek as much coordination as possible in the timing and venues of the different efforts to maximize their total impact.

The Research, Development and Evaluation Partner (HSPC) will be responsible for:

- Conducting message development research: polls, focus groups, expert consultation, literature reviews
- Facilitating meetings of child protection expert group, feeding in results from message development research and generating concrete messages based upon group theme (in consultation with operating partner)
- Evaluating the impact of messages in pilot communities, for specified audiences, and feeding results back into message development effort.

4. External Review and Dissemination of Findings

- Write research articles and conference presentations
- Use professional association panel discussions as method to both report findings and obtain external feedback to help refine strategies. Will include conferences of both child protection and communication professionals.

5. Project Budget and Phasing

A. Multiple funders. We will seek initial core funding from the Stuart Foundations to get the project established and give it a legitimate base of operations at UW/HSPC. We will then work with other potentially interested funders. Funders who have contributed to communications efforts in child protection or related areas include:

- **Private Foundations:** Edna McConnell Clark, Kellogg, Casey Family, Annie E. Casey
- **Federal Agencies**: National Commission on Child Abuse and Neglect; Dept. of Justice; National Institutes of Health.

B. Project Phasing

In the first 6-9 months, the bulk of the effort and resources will be spent by the research and development partner on message development; the operating partner will require funds for its participation in message development, for preparing pilot communities to conduct communication efforts and in project steering committee activities. Starting in the second six months, the operating partner will require significant funds to implement communication activities. Research partner funding will shift to evaluation and feedback, with a continuing role in project coordination.

In addition to funds spent centrally for message development and coordination, funds will have to be spent in each of three pilot communities to enhance their staff capacity to engage in effective communication activity. This could take the form of either buying additional resources to free existing staff for communication activity, or hiring additional staff with communications skills. It will also pay for travel, copying and printing and other costs incidental to mounting communication efforts.

Desirable Characteristics Of An Operating Partner

1. a private, non-profit organization with a long-term interest in child protection
   - interest in public policy, but independent from public agencies
   - close contact with families and communities around the state
2. the ability to operate a broad based communication effort, including
   - mass media, targeted mailings, newsletters, etc
   - community meetings, speakers bureau
3. willing to work cooperatively on systematic message development, testing and evaluation; learning orientation
4. good credibility with public and policy community for expertise, impartiality
5. strong organizational capacity to manage, operate multi-site activity